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Exploration of Strategies of Teacher Leaders for Responding to Students Experiencing Trauma Framed in CASEL's Social and Emotional Learning Theory

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Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

by

Kimberly Dionne Parrott, MA

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my core: the individuals who ground me, encourage me, cover protect me, and who have shown me the significance of having caring individuals to support others who have endured trauma. First, to my parents, Rev. and Mrs. Van Smith, Jr.: As educators, they were my first examples of how valuable it is to implement social and emotional learning strategies to students who have endured traumatic experiences. I saw how they not only taught the subject, but they taught the student, and gave students the care they needed so they can have a positive learning experience. Next, I dedicate this dissertation to my children, Nicholas Bruce and Noah Burnett Carroll. Through their own experience with trauma, I have realized that as an educator, I don't have control over the experiences students have been exposed to when they come to school, but I do have control over the support I provide while they are at school. Lastly, I dedicate this dissertation to my amazing and loving husband, Ralph Parrott. Thank you for loving me despite my own trauma and reminding me that God favors me and hears my prayers. Thank you for your support during my doctoral journey and for believing in me when I was low on energy and confidence. Thank you for being my best friend. Until we see Jesus.

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative instrumental case study was to explore strategies for supporting students experiencing trauma as perceived by teacher leaders framed in CASEL's social and emotional learning theory. A descriptive instrumental case study design utilized data from online interviews and voluntarily submitted artifacts of nine middle school teacher leaders to investigate strategies used to support students experiencing trauma. Data were manually coded to determine themes indicating recommend strategies used to support students who have experienced trauma. The overall findings revealed that teacher leaders require professional development focusing on trauma-informed practices to suitably support students who are experiencing trauma. The findings suggest that integrating social and emotional learning in academics is a key component in providing support for students who have endured difficult life circumstances.

Keywords: strategies, middle school, social and emotional learning, relationship skills, self-management, responsible decision making, empathy, professional development

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Chapter 1: Introduction

Students in grades K-12 who have experienced trauma are increasingly more evident in school systems across the nation, and as a result, educators are being faced with the responsibility to respond to the various needs of these students (Luthar & Mendes, 2020; Rosenberg et al., 2014). Students are exposed to difficult and challenging issues which impact their social and emotional needs, causing them to experience difficulties in school, such as problems with academics, discipline, engaging with peers and authority, and their ability to cultivate empathic relationships and make sound decisions (Cummings et al., 2017; Frydman & Mayor, 2017; Von Dohlen et al., 2019). Stokes and Brunzell (2019) stated that various types of trauma affect the capabilities of children to acquire new information, foster healthy connections, and comply with classroom and school discipline codes of conduct. Because of the trauma experiences of students, the school environment and the relationship students have with their teachers become critical in responding appropriately to students' needs (Espelage et al., 2021). It is paramount that educators equip themselves with the necessary training and knowledge on the impact of trauma and how to cultivate supportive environments for students (Yohannan & Carlson, 2019).

I will introduce the study in Chapter 1. This includes the background of the study, the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, research questions, theoretical framework, the rationale for the study, and defining key terms, and this chapter concludes with a summary and organization of the study.

Background of the Study

Castro et al. (2019) emphasized that adults experience difficult situations which influence how they perform and interact with others. However, they noted most adults have the capacity

and maturity to process emotions and facilitate daily interactions successfully. Even still, some adults are challenged to respond aptly to their own traumatic experiences and maintain normalcy. Students in grades K-12 who have not yet achieved maturity, struggle significantly to reply suitably when they have endured difficult and troubling encounters in their lives (Cummings et al., 2017; Frydman & Mayor, 2017; Von Dohlen et al., 2019). Tabone et al. (2020) argued when students go to school and display an outward emotional response to personal traumatic experiences, it often results in students being withdrawn and angry, displaying behavior issues, or exhibiting noncompliant reactions, which makes it difficult for educators to teach or engage with the students. This type of emotional response from students causes teacher leaders and school personnel to find strategies and tools to implement when they must address adverse student behavior or issues because of the trauma students have endured (Tabone et al., 2020).

The traumatic events or understandings that children have experienced from ages 0–17 years are known as adverse childhood experiences, or ACEs (CDC, 2020). Many students in grades K-12 have adverse childhood experiences, and as a result, have some measure of difficulty in school environments and seek support from their teachers and school personnel (Mersky et al., 2017; Wan et al., 2020). Extensive research supports that an individual who has experienced ACEs is a person who has endured traumatic events, an individual who may have feelings of intense fear, horror, or helplessness, and in response, may display unsystematic or disconcerted behavior (Goddard, 2021; Mersky et al., 2017; Stempel et al., 2017; Wan et al., 2020). Trauma is a deeply distressing experience (Guarino & Chagnon, 2018). Recent studies have acknowledged that students experience trauma and how it impacts their performance in school (Gherardi et al., 2020; Stratford et al., 2020; Tabone et al., 2020). Studies have detailed how global occurrences, such as the pandemic of COVID-19, natural disasters (like a hurricane),

and national events (e.g., political election and civil unrest) are all traumatic events students have recently experienced (Baloran, 2020; Diab & Schultz, 2021; Hannigan & Saini, 2020). These events shape how students feel, and how they process concerns, emotions, their academic performance, perceptions, and the foundation of their relationships with others (Diab & Schultz, 2021). Even more specific experiences, such as divorce, illness, death, or family separation, may result in students experiencing trauma (Goddard, 2021).

Teacher leaders are aware that almost all students have experienced some sort of trauma (Diab & Schultz, 2021; Goodwin, 2020). Baloran (2020) noted that most recently, teachers are witnessing students who are dealing with the traumatic effects associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. Students' method of receiving instruction abruptly changed from face to face, to hybrid, to completely online. As a result of the rapid change with the way students interact with their friends due to COVID restrictions, and concern about their health and safety, some students have become withdrawn, and exhibit emotions associated with anxiety, depression, anger, and fear (Baloran, 2020; Hannigan & Saini, 2020). These emotions are exhibited through responses such as disruptive behavior, failing grades, combative interactions, and noncompliance. Teachers recognize trauma and can assess when something is wrong (Goodwin, 2020; Yohannan & Carlson, 2019).

Teachers seek interventions, methods, and techniques to implement to help respond effectively to students who have experienced traumatic events (Dunn & Doolittle, 2020; Howell et al., 2019; McIntyre et al., 2019). However, just recognizing or acknowledging that trauma influences student behavior is not the significant challenge teacher leaders' experience; for example, when asked, teachers acknowledge that they are aware that students experience certain things and as a result, these experiences of students shape how they behave, interpret

information, perceive assistance, and respond to authority (Herrenkohl et al., 2019; Stokes & Brunzell, 2019).

Statement of the Problem

Trauma-informed practices in schools help establish a safe environment for students who have endured traumatic events or are exposed to any experiences that threaten their emotional safety (Chafouleas et al., 2016; Cummings et al., 2017; Howell et al., 2019; Stokes & Brunzell, 2019; Yohannan & Carlson, 2019). However, the problem of this study, supported by Herrenkohl et al. (2019) is that too often, teacher leaders lack the necessary tools to properly address the trauma of students to help successfully navigate emotions and feel safe and secure in learning environments. Teachers play a critical role in establishing students' emotional wellness, thus the implementation of trauma-informed strategies which empowers teachers and helps students, are critical to the establishing healthy learning environments (Stokes & Brunzell, 2019).

The four Rs of trauma-informed practices include the following: (a) realizing the impact of trauma, (b) recognizing the signs and symptoms of trauma, (c) responding to trauma with trauma-informed practices and procedures, and (d) resisting retraumatization of students when responding to their concerns (Boldt, 2020; Moore et al., 2020; Pawlo et al., 2019; Tabone et al., 2020). Yet, some teachers are unaware of techniques to assist students experiencing trauma (Herrenkohl et al., 2019). As a result, teachers are referring students to the discipline office for disruption, resulting in a disconnect in the student/teacher relationship (Goodwin, 2020; Stratford et al., 2020).

Social and emotional learning (SEL) serves as a foundation to address student trauma (Pawlo et al., 2019). Howell et al. (2019) suggested, "The degree of trauma exposure among our

adolescent students makes it imperative for school leadership to engage in ensuring school-wide systems and practices are in place" (p. 26). However, teacher leaders require prescriptive professional development opportunities focusing on trauma-informed practices to support the needs of students who have behavior issues as a result of distressing, or traumatic experiences (Crosby et al., 2020).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative instrumental case study was to explore strategies for supporting students experiencing trauma as perceived by teacher leaders framed in CASEL's social and emotional learning theory (Aksoy & Gresham, 2020; Boldt, 2020; Pawlo et al., 2019).

Research Questions

RQ1: How do teacher leaders teach empathy to students to help them respond to trauma?

RQ2: How do teacher leaders build trusting relationships with students to help them respond to trauma?

RQ3: How do teacher leaders empower students to make responsible decisions to help them respond to trauma?

RQ4: How do teacher leaders support self-awareness of students to help them respond to trauma?

RQ5: How do teacher leaders teach self-management to students to help them respond to trauma?

Teacher leaders and their relationships with their students are pivotal to the success of the implementation of trauma-informed practices (Boullier & Blair, 2018). Wenner and Campbell (2017) described teacher leaders as "teachers who maintain K-12 classroom-based teaching responsibilities, while also taking on leadership responsibilities outside of the classroom" (p. 7).

Collinson and Tourish (2015) described these teachers as "informal leaders who 'walk ahead,' model learning and innovation, and develop relationships and networks to extend their learning and influence others" (p. 247). Teacher leaders can also be explained as sharing knowledge of pedagogy and classroom management with fellow educators, openness to accept leadership opportunities when asked, and continuously extending beyond teaching duties to serve students and the school (Angelle & DeHart, 2016). Thus, the working definition in this study of teacher leaders is teachers who have responsibilities beyond the classroom while teaching, who model strategies and influence others, and individuals who share pedagogy and classroom management strategies to help improve classroom and campus climate and culture (Angelle & DeHart, 2016; Collinson & Tourish, 2015; Wenner & Campbell, 2017). Therefore, the intended participants of this study were middle school teacher leaders in a metropolitan area in the South. Study participants were those individuals who have been identified as teacher leaders by having received recognition from their school, district, state, or other sources, have taught three to five years, and self-identify as working with students who have experienced trauma.

Conceptual Framework

SEL is constructed based on five competencies (see Figure 1). SEL helps students and teachers establish healthy emotional responses by acquiring knowledge that focuses on self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making (Pawlo et al., 2019). Trauma-informed education is an extension of SEL which teaches methods on how teachers grow to engage with their students through prescriptive opportunities for relationship building (Boldt, 2020; Pawlo et al., 2019). Bell (2018) and Casale et al. (2018) acknowledged having a trauma-informed approach encourages the foundation for teachers to establish empathy which is the ability to understand and relate to the feelings of others. Teachers

who show intentional efforts to extended empathy to students who have experienced trauma create the foundation of trust and safety.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework

The primary theoretical framework used for this dissertation was based on social and emotional learning (SEL). SEL serves as the foundation to address student trauma (Pawlo et al., 2019). Research supports that the implementation of SEL components, such as trauma-informed practices, which help to create supportive, nurturing and empowering settings for individuals who have experienced trauma, can have a significant influence on decreasing office discipline referrals and promoting a positive, and healthy school climate (Espelage et al., 2021; Taylor et al., 2016).

Based on the work of James Comer, a Yale University professor in the 1960s, SEL was conceived when Comer (2015) and other professors established a program that focused on uniting stakeholders in reviewing school policies that seek to understand not just the academic aspect of the student, but their emotional wellbeing as well. Comer's research contributed to his creation of the School Development Program, which stated that principles such as social climate, student relationships, and the emotional and mental health of students, are vital in helping students feel safe in learning environments and are necessary to be successful academically and emotionally (Lofland, 1995). Comer deliberated on the relationship between students' experiences and exposure to troubling events and its influence on their academic achievement and discipline (Duhan, 2020). Comer's research has been credited as the foundation for the implementation of curriculum as well as school initiatives that focus on stakeholders' responsibility to address problems involving students' emotions, feelings, ability to respond appropriately, have empathy, and make sound decisions (Weissberg et al., 1997). Numerous studies have investigated the relevance of SEL when addressing students who have experienced traumatic events and the positive impact this framework has on supporting students' needs and building trust and resiliency (CASEL, 2017; Dusenbury & Weissberg, 2017; Weissberg et al., 1997).

The SEL framework equips teacher leaders with the strategies needed to view students' needs through a trauma-focused lens (Kim et al., 2021). Research supports that SEL programs, which focus mainly on the wellbeing of students, help when designing strategies that benefit students who have experienced trauma (Baloran, 2020; Kim et al., 2021). These strategies, known as trauma-informed practices, draw from the five competencies of SEL, which are social awareness, self-awareness, self-management, relationship skills and responsible decision making

(Aksoy & Gresham, 2020; CASEL, 2020). Trauma-informed practices are the establishment of systems which takes into account experiences that may have been life-threatening or detrimental for an individual, and organize a response that seeks to address the emotional wellbeing of the individual who has survived traumatic situations (Butler et al., 2017; Coffey et al., 2010).

Rationale for the Study

This study will contribute to research conducted on the implementation of strategies implemented by teacher leaders for responding to students who have been exposed to trauma. The rationale for the study is to better understand strategies being implemented for supporting students experiencing trauma as perceived by middle school teacher leaders. Framing this study within SEL and trauma-informed practices (Boldt, 2020) constructs provide a lens for understanding.

Williams (2018) argued that trauma-informed instruction acknowledges the detrimental effects of trauma on students' overall performance and ability to cope effectively in learning environments and seeks to improve students' abilities to control their behavior and reactions, make reasonable decisions, and establish resiliency. Teaching students skills such as empathy, how to cope with difficult situations, self-management, and responsible decision making, related to the lasting results of health and success (Sanders et al., 2013). The study is important because it contributes to the current research on the significance of trauma-informed practices to support students experiencing trauma. This study will identify SEL strategies that can be used as a foundation for professional development required to acquire specific methods and techniques to use in learning environments.

Definition of Key Terms

To enhance the reader's comprehension of subject matter, key terms that will be used throughout this study were typically defined as follows:

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). Events or understandings that children have experienced from ages 0-17 years (CDC, 2020).

Empathy. The ability to share and relate to another person's emotional state and well-being (Ioannidou & Konstantikaki, 2008).

Resilience. The capability to adapt successfully to difficulties that intend to disrupt functionality, viability, and development (Masten, 2018).

Retraumatization. A deliberate or unintentional prompt of past trauma in a reexperiencing of the initial trauma occurrence (Griffin-Shelley et al., 2014).

Social and emotional learning. The process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (CASEL, 2020).

Teacher leader. Teachers who have responsibilities beyond the classroom while teaching, who model strategies and influence others, and individuals who share pedagogy and classroom management strategies to help improve classroom and campus climate and culture (Angelle & DeHart, 2016; Collinson & Tourish, 2015; Wenner & Campbell, 2017).

Trauma. An experience that threatens life or physical integrity and overwhelms an individual's capacity to cope (Coffey et al., 2010).

Trauma-informed practices. Practices that consider the influence of traumatic events on individuals, and the application of knowledge to the organization of systems of services that meet the needs of trauma survivors (Butler et al., 2017).

Trauma-informed school. A learning environment where stakeholders identify and respond to the academic, behavioral and emotional impact of stress on those in the school community (Sempel et al., 2010).

Summary and Organization of the Study

This dissertation study is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 has introduced the reader to the contextual foundation surrounding the implementation of trauma-informed practices and strategies by teacher leaders to address adverse behaviors of students exposed to trauma. Chapter 2 provides a review of literature describing Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACESs) and their connection to trauma. The literature will include the definition of ACEs, descriptions of some events that may contribute to an Adverse Childhood Experience, how these experiences precipitate and contribute to trauma, and then the influence of trauma on student behavior. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology of the study. Chapter 4 reviews the results of the study. Chapter 5 provides a discussion of the findings.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

There has been significant research on trauma and its influence on students' ability to perform well academically and behaviorally (Herrenkohl et al., 2019; McEvoy & Salvador, 2020; McIntyre et al., 2019). Through the exploration of social and emotional learning (SEL), which supports the constructs of trauma-informed practices, teacher leaders' application of encouraging, helpful, empathetic, and authentic methods, help students' emotional progression, relationship skills, and responsible decision making (McIntyre et al., 2019; O'Toole et al., 2019; Pawlo et al., 2019).

Chapter 2 consists of four sections. The first section reviews the literature on the theoretical framework of social and emotional learning and its relation to trauma-informed practices. The second section outlines the definition of trauma and its influences on students' academic and the specific and social existence in learning environments. The third section focuses on middle school students, their developmental and social and emotional concerns, and the trauma they have been exposed to. This section also explains the connection middle school students have with their teachers and how teachers help students establish empathy, foster healthy relationships, and make sound decisions. The final section of this literature discusses recommended professional development for teacher leaders who seek to employ proactive tactics to support students who have lived through traumatic experiences and benefit from embedded practices that help facilitate their independence to manage their emotions and minimize negative responses related to their trauma.

The literature organized for this study incorporates a myriad of catalogs. The literature for this chapter includes Abilene Christian University library, scholarly peer-review articles, and dissertations. The literature also includes relevant information from organizations such as

CASEL (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning), National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN), and Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Websites on social and emotional learning, and Adverse Childhood Experiences providing descriptions of exemplars for professional development for teacher leaders that focuses on trauma-informed practices were also reviewed.

Theoretical Framework

Social and emotional learning as a concept that can be dated back as far as Plato (Beaty, 2018). Plato believed in whole-child development and that education should establish systems that prepare students to have upstanding character, compassionate human beings, as well as constructive and engaging citizens (Moreno et al., 2019). Years later, Harvard professor James Comer furthered the foundation of this holistic approach by incorporating students' emotional and moral character and wellbeing into understanding how they are viewed by those who support them in learning environments (Beaty, 2018; Comer, 2015). Comer's observation of students in various schools leads him to establish the Comer School Development Program, or CSDP (Edutopia, 2011). Comer's work with the CSDP established that children benefit greatly when they have positive relationships with adults, specifically in school environments, which address not only their academic needs but emotional needs as well (Beaty, 2018). Years later, Weissberg et al. (1997) extended the research of James Comer to suggest the importance of incorporating skills in schools that will assist students with assessing the intensity of feelings, controlling impulses identifying and managing emotions reducing stress to assist with students having emotional competency (Beaty, 2018; CASEL, 2018).

In 1994, educators convened at Fetzer Institute to discuss previous research, including the work of Comer, Weissberg, Shiver, and others, regarding the validity of addressing students'

emotional well-being in addition to other aspects that collectively contribute to their success, or difficulty in school environments (Beaty, 2018). From this meeting the term, social and emotional learning was originated, in addition to the inception of the leading organization which provides the framework for social and emotional learning, named Collaborative for Academic and Social and Emotional Learning, commonly known as CASEL (2018). Social and emotional learning (SEL) is a concept that speaks to the emotional needs of students (Aksoy & Gresham, 2020). SEL seeks to address how students feel in response to various situations and validate that their feelings matter. Espelage et al. (2021) shared that students' emotions are extremely vulnerable after they have endured traumatic experiences.

Espelage et al. (2021) emphasized the importance of SEL systems and how incorporating these methods into daily practices helps preempt potential behaviors that may be associated with negative behaviors of students who are having a difficult time coping because of things they have experienced. Similarly, Gulbrandsen (2018) noted that SEL practices help students independently cultivate characteristics that are helpful when independently managing behaviors that may not be conducive to a learning environment or when working with others. Gulbrandsen explained this as being accomplished through the focus of resources, methodologies, techniques, and professional development which centers on the five competencies of SEL. The five competencies of SEL are self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2021). Researchers' descriptions of the competencies serve as goals for individuals 'behavior when processing emotions healthily and productively (Aksoy & Greshman, 2020; Espelege et al., 2020; Gulbrandsen, 2018).

SEL has been linked to having positive reactions with students who have experienced trauma (Schonert-Reichl, 2019). SEL methods equip students and teachers with the necessary

resources to cultivate more positive attitudes toward oneself, others, and tasks, including enhanced self-efficacy, confidence, persistence, empathy, connection, and commitment to school, and a sense of purpose (Boldt, 2020; O'Toole et al., 2019). These resources have proven to be pivotal in transforming the mindsets of students who have been exposed to traumatic or distressing detrimental experiences (Hickey et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2021; Weissberg, 2019).

Social and emotional learning supports the efforts of trauma-informed practices (Schonert-Reichl, 2019). When educators approach students with the understanding that trauma can influence their behavior and perceptions, they have the advantage to assist students to reach their potential through the implementation of SEL support (Espelage et al., 2021). McEvoy and Salvador (2020) described trauma as events that have been physically or emotionally detrimental for individuals, specifically students, which have lasting antagonistic effects that can be damaging. These researchers argued the importance of trauma-informed practices was embedded in learning environments. Trauma-informed practices are systems that take into account the influence of traumatic events on individuals, and the application of knowledge to the organization of systems of services that meet the needs of trauma survivors (Butler et al., 2017). Such habits and systems acknowledge the connection between exposure to trauma and negative reactions and focus on not retraumatizing individuals or being insensitive to their needs (McIntyre et al., 2019). In learning environments, trauma-informed practices have proven beneficial because they establish an atmosphere of care, empathy, and concern (Smith, 2017). This is extremely important when teachers view defiant student behavior as a choice, instead of a possible reaction to trauma students have experienced (Yohannan & Carlson, 2019). Social and emotional learning competencies establish a solid framework for trauma-informed practices

utilized by teachers as a supportive response to students who are undergoing difficulty due to their exposure to unfavorable circumstances (Brunzell et al., 2016).

The connection between Social and emotional learning and trauma-informed practices highlights the foundation of emotional wellness support and the needs of students affected by trauma (Stokes & Brunzell, 2019). Research substantiates that students impacted by devastating events associated with trauma long for an understanding of their emotions and their behavior, as well as a need to feel safe, and decrease the feeling of distrust and anger towards others (Tabone et al., 2020; Yohannan & Carlson, 2019). In response, SEL competencies serve as a guide to simplify personal awareness and reflection, facilitate self-management skills, and construct relationship skills that will help when interacting with others (Pawlo et al., 2019). SEL and trauma-informed practices collectively help students build competencies and skills that will be helpful when they are presented with challenges that are possibly the result of their traumatic experiences (Pawlo et al., 2019).

Trauma-informed practices which are guided by the competencies of social and emotional learning have proven to be helpful to guide students to manage their behavior, impart empathy towards others, build social awareness and relationship skills, as well as, enable personal awareness and comprehension (Espelage et al., 2021). However, it is imperative for teachers who implement social and emotional learning and trauma-informed practices as interventions or strategies to address adverse student behavior caused by trauma, to fully understand what trauma is and the significant influence it can have on students' behavior, emotions, and academic abilities (Boldt, 2020; McIntyre et al., 2019; Yohannan & Carlson, 2019).

The Impact of Trauma

Trauma and its impact on students have been widely researched and reviewed in learning environments (Chafouleas et al., 2016; Frydham & Mayor, 2017; Wright & Ogbuehi, 2014). Trauma is defined as experiences that threaten life or physical integrity and overwhelm an individual's capacity to cope (Coffey et al., 2010). Per the National Traumatic Child Stress Network (2020), traumatic experiences come in many forms, ranging from isolated occurrences to experiences that are lingering or even generational. Potentially traumatic experiences for children and youth in school may include natural disasters, such as hurricanes, fires, floods, or global pandemics, such as COVID-19 (Moore et al., 2020; NTCS, 2020). Additional traumatic experiences school-aged children may encounter also include human-caused disasters such as accidents, wars, environmental disasters, acts of terrorism as well as community violence like robberies, shootings, assault, gang-related violence, hate crimes, group trauma affecting a particular community; and school violence such as threats, fights, school shootings, bullying, loss of a student or staff member (Moore et al., 2020; NTCS, 2020). These encounters can collectively be described as adverse childhood experiences (CDC, 2020).

The feeling of an incapacity to cope is often expressed by children who have endured Adverse Childhood Experiences, also known as ACEs (Pawlo et al., 2019). ACEs are the theoretical traumatic events or understandings that children have experienced from ages 0-17 (CDC, 2020). Students who have been exposed to trauma are likely to have challenges in school (Perfect et al., 2016). The association of Adverse Childhood Experiences and the difficulty students have in school have been substantiated through various research studies (Dutil, 2020; Larson et al., 2017; Parker et al., 2020). Trauma influences the capacity for children to experience positive interactions and relationships with peers, make reasonable decisions,

implement self-management to conduct themselves appropriately, as well as maintain cognitive abilities (Dutil, 2020). The National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH) reported that the United States children have experienced at least one ACE and one in nine children nationally has personal knowledge of three of more Adverse Childhood Experiences (NSCH, 2018; Sacks & Murphey, 2020). Therefore, it is inevitable that there will be children in schools who will exhibit problems related to the trauma they have experienced (Sacks & Murphey, 2020).

Students who have experienced disturbing events in their lives grappling with the challenge of maintaining healthy relationships after dealing with the harsh aftermath of surviving trauma (Naik, 2019). Because of their acquaintance with ACEs, students who have been negatively impacted by trauma, typically have feelings and reasoning that disturb their capacity to behave in adaptive ways. Hunt et al. (2017) explained that the number of adverse children experiences a student has is directly related to the increased number of discipline or behavior concerns they may experience at school. Guarino and Chagnon (2018) explained that trauma is a deeply distressing experience and contributes heavily to why students may exhibit challenging behavior at school. Thus, students struggle with self-management and as a result, present challenging behaviors. Examples of these challenging behaviors include defiance, ignoring and disrespecting authority, exhibiting a combative attitude, and aggression towards others, which subsequently results in teachers submitting discipline referrals to school administration (Gregory et al., 2017; Gregory & Fergus, 2017).

In a research study conducted by Gregory and Fergus (2017), teacher leaders expressed that they are overwhelmed and feel ill-equipped to properly handle adverse student behavior from students who have experienced traumatic events. This study reported that teacher leaders may think it is possible that trauma contributes somewhat to behavior problems, but for the most

part, students are making a deliberate choice to misbehave. Unfortunately, students who have been exposed to trauma and struggle with appropriate conduct at school, are often given exclusionary discipline placements as a response to their infractions (Hashmi & Abbas, 2018). This response does not address the root cause of their conduct, which is their exposure to trauma or does it provide supportive practices, such as the implementation of self-management, and sound decision-making strategies, to help students avoid behavior problems (Goegan et al., 2017; Hashmi & Abbas, 2018; Nenonene et al., 2019).

Trauma not only has a bearing on students' behavior, but it also contributes to cognitive and academic concerns as well (Frydman & Mayor, 2017; Layne et al., 2014; Moore et al., 2020). Adverse Childhood Experiences precipitate students' association to trauma, which can cause a cognitive and emotional response such as stress (NTSC, 2020). There are four trauma-impacted domains identified by The Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative that can disrupt achievement in learning environments; they are self-regulation, relationships, physical functioning, and academics (Tishelman et al., 2010). When stress due to trauma is activated, cortisol, a long-lasting stress hormone, is dispersed and the response can be problems with cognition or the ability to think clearly (Harris, 2018). Students are focusing on coping, rather than processing new information (Harris, 2018). Research has suggested that students who have been exposed to trauma have an increased likelihood to struggle with attention, interaction with peers, and substandard academic performance, and as a result, academic expectations can become difficult for students to complete (Blodgett & Lanigan, 2018; Jimenez et al., 2016).

In an extensive research study on brain function, van der Kolk (2014), described how the brain responds to stress caused by trauma: from the perspective of a student in the learning environment, an experience becomes traumatic when it overwhelms a student's ability to respond

to stress. As a result, students feel helpless, vulnerable, and out of control. van der Kolk (2014) argued that the student's ability to think is interrupted and they are overwhelmed with emotion. This makes it difficult for students to synthesize newly acquired information and retain prior knowledge and apply it in new contexts. Harris (2018) suggested that students who have stress that is related to their response to traumatic experiences have difficulty engaging in higher-level thinking, or executive functioning skills. Consequently, these students struggle academically and find difficulty concentrating or synthesizing information constructively.

Trauma impacts students both academically and behaviorally (Crosby et al., 2020, 2021; Harris, 2018). Larson et al. (2017) reported that a particularly vulnerable population of students who are affected by trauma is middle school students. Middle school students experience an array of developmental and emotional changes which can be exacerbated even more when they have been exposed to and survived traumatic experiences.

Trauma and Middle School Students

Middle schools serve pre-adolescent and young adolescent students between the grades of five and nine, with most in grades six through eight (Howell et al., 2019). This group is a particularly vulnerable age group because of the emotional, and physical developmental changes they are experiencing (Howell et al., 2019; Provinzano et al., 2020). Middle school years, also known as adolescence, are associated with a "growth-related to puberty as well as a range of psychosocial changes associated with developing an increasingly refined identity" (Mann et al., 2014, p. 2). Furthermore, adolescent development is exceptionally intricate because there is a limited maturity to the frontal lobe of the brain, which disrupts a student's ability to have predictable and controlled behavior, as well as make sound decisions (Howell et al., 2019). Crosby et al. (2020) explained that these issues are complicated even more for middle school

students who have experienced trauma. Middle schoolers who have a history of trauma may have lasting consequences with the development of their brain, significant impulsivity, increased challenges with higher-level cognitive thinking, and interruptions with academic and social skills (Howell et al., 2019).

Undoubtedly, obstacles such as lack of enough brain development, impulsive behavior, and difficulty with cognition can further complicate a middle school student's learning experience, making school difficult and uncomfortable (Roseby & Gascoigne, 2021). Research studies suggest the need to embed practices that seek to provide trauma-informed care, implement by adult advocates on campus (Crosby et al., 2020; Howell et al., 2019; Silverman & Mee, 2019; Von Dohlen et al., 2019).

Through the context of *The Keys to Educating Young Adolescents*, The National Middle School Association (NASMA) listed several key goals for middle school educators which highlight their ability to provide guidance and support to meet the needs of adolescents, serving as an advocate for their personal and emotional well-being, as well as help establish a safe, inclusive and supportive learning environment (Lounsbury, 2010). These crucial characteristics are important even more so when addressing the needs of middle school students who have experienced trauma. School personnel, specifically middle school teacher leaders, must facilitate the implementation of trauma-informed practices which establishes a safe climate that focuses on the understanding of the emotional predispositions of students in this age group and endeavor to handle the students with dignity, compassion, and support (Howell et al., 2019). Scales et al. (2020) suggested for these practices to be truly helpful, there must be a relationship established between middle teacher leaders and their students. If not, it may significantly hinder the

effectiveness of the implementation and ultimately prove to be counterproductive for the student which it was designed to help.

Middle School Teacher and Student Relationships

Scales et al. (2020) explained through extensive research that middle school students' relationships with their teachers significantly contribute to the students' feeling of safety and belonging (Gnambs & Hanfstingl, 2016; Kosovich et al., 2017). The feeling of safety of middle school students is compromised because of the trauma they have experienced. Students who have been exposed to trauma have one or multiple ACEs typically experience ongoing stress, also known as toxic stress (Blodgett & Lanigan, 2018). Harris (2018) noted toxic stress happens when "a child experiences strong, frequent, and/or prolonged adversity-such as physical or emotional abuse, neglect, caregiver substance abuse or mental illness, exposure to violence, and/or accumulated burdens of family economic hardship-without adequate adult support" (p. 54). As a result of a student's association with toxic stress, their stress response system is triggered multiple times throughout a school day. This reaction impedes brain functionality and makes it very difficult for students to explain their emotional state and constructively manage their behavior. Although toxic stress is generally related to any student who has experienced one or more ACEs, it seems to be particularly even more challenging for middle school students, due to the physiological and psychological changes they experience, which are linked to their maturation during puberty (Harris, 2018; Howell et al., 2019; Von Dohelen et al., 2019). Scales et al. (2020) substantiated that having trusted school personnel, such as teacher leaders, helps students facilitate the emotions they encounter due to stress associated with trauma. Furthermore, Scales et al. (2020) explained that relationships between student and teacher, especially in middle

school, are pivotal to students implementing self-management, understanding empathy, as well as making sound responsible decisions.

Scales et al. (2020) noted intensification in belligerence and lack of inhibitory self-management, in addition to wool-gathering to academic information contribute to the child's ability to form positive relationships with his or her teacher. Yet developmental relationships with school personnel significantly determine middle school students' sense of motivation and feeling of safety. In a systematic review of the existing literature regarding how trauma impacts students, Roseby and Gascoigne (2021) explained that students who have experienced trauma generally do not feel safe and are distrusting of adults. They noted students' feelings of distrust are a result of them being fearful that the trauma they experience will be perpetual, therefore, they must constantly be on guard and protect their emotions and limit exposure of their vulnerabilities to others. As a result, students who have experienced trauma become combative, withdrawn, easily agitated, and aggressive. Teacher leaders establishing a safe and secure environment is vital to the development of students developing management tools to help them process the emotional reactions they exhibit due to their exposure to trauma (Davis & Buchanan, 2020). The establishment of a feeling of safety for students is largely predicated on the supportive relationships they have with supportive school personnel (Davis & Buchanan, 2020; Silverman & Mee, 2019).

Middle school students experience an array of emotions due to their maturation associated with puberty (Davis & Buchanan, 2020; Duong et al., 2019). These emotions are heightened especially for middle school students who have experienced trauma. Often, middle school students are exhibiting challenging behavior towards adults and test boundaries regarding their capability to be respectful, compliant, and pleasant (Silverman & Mee, 2019). Duong et al.

(2019) characterized middle school students as individuals who want to exhibit a seemingly false sense of maturity by exuding an attitude of independence and control. Teacher leaders who establish positive relationships with students, especially those in middle school, provide examples of how to interact positively and respectfully toward others (Dotson Davis, 2019; Duong et al., 2019; Scales et al., 2020). As a result of cultivating positive relationships with their teachers, middle school students increase in their capacity to reflect on their actions and determine independently what is appropriate and what is not (Dotson Davis, 2019). This is exceptionally important, even more so, for middle school students who have experienced trauma, because of the cognitive impairment they have endured, which presents challenges both academically and emotionally (Silverman & Mee, 2019).

There is an increased demand for middle school students to have learning environments that are supportive and nurturing, subsequently, highlighting the need for middle school teachers to establish positive relationships (Larson et al., 2017). Middle school students who were exposed to trauma have a sincere need to connect to adults they can trust and have a feeling of security (Silverman & Mee, 2018). Middle school educators maintain a consistency of routines and procedures, which are critical in establishing relationships and provide the foundation of a system of care and nurturing (Howell et al., 2019; Von Dohlen et al., 2019). The connection between a middle school student who has experienced trauma and a teacher leader can have a significant impact on the student experiencing emotional healing and independence (Von Dohlen et al., 2019).

In a research study reviewing the influence of student-teacher relationships when addressing trauma, Stokes and Brunzell (2019) explained that teacher leaders generally establish positive interactions and relationships with their students through their extension of empathy.

They suggested that showing empathy towards students, especially those who have experienced traumatic events, provides an alternative to punitive, harsh discipline consequences. Various research studies support that empathy is critical when providing support for students who have experienced trauma (Bixler-Funk, 2018; Levy et al., 2019; Wenchao & Xinchun, 2020).

Middle School Teachers and Empathy

Empathy is the ability to share and relate to another person's emotional state and well-being (Gunawan et al., 2019; Ioannidou & Konstantikaki, 2008; Riess, 2017). Psychologists Daniel Goleman and Paul Ekman have categorized empathy into three components, which are cognitive, emotional, and compassionate (Powell & Roberts, 2017). Researchers Batanova and Loukas (2014) described specific characteristics of each form of empathy. For example, Batanova and Loukas explained that cognitive empathy is knowing how someone feels. Also known as perspective-talking, cognitive empathy causes an individual to possibly know what another person is thinking. Emotional empathy is described as physically feeling what another person is feeling. This type of empathy is said to explain when emotions are contagious. Compassionate empathy is when individuals not only understand another person's predicament or situation but are compelled to do something about it.

Establishing empathy towards students who have experienced detrimental events in their lives is important when creating positive relationships and establishing a safe environment (Riess, 2017). Students often cannot express or even identify the emotions they have that are a result of the trauma they have experienced (Crosby et al., 2020; Lounsbury, 2010). Empathy helps connect the emotions students are experiencing with the understanding and compassion they need from others (Crosby et al., 2020).

Empathy is associated with the social awareness competency of social and emotional learning (Boldt, 2020; CASEL, 2020; Knight et al., 2019). Social and emotional learning competencies highlight the needs of students who have been affected negatively by trauma (Bolt, 2020; Schonert-Reichl, 2019). Students who have been exposed to traumatic events have an exigency for others to be understanding of the situations they have endured, and how these students influence their actions and responses to others (Bell, 2018; Bouton, 2016; Knight et al., 2019). Through the implementation of social and emotional learning methods that promote empathy, students have an opportunity to identify their own emotions as well as recognize the feeling of others (Bell, 2018). As a result of students experiencing empathy and extending empathy to others, there is a greater opportunity for positive relationships to form (Bouton, 2016). When students are engaged in positive relationships, especially with their teachers, they feel safe and valued (Dotson Davis, 2019; Duong et al., 2019; Scales et al., 2020).

Safety is a significant requirement for students who have an association with Adverse Childhood Experiences, and who have endured trauma (Pawlo et al., 2019). Middle school educators maintain a consistency of routines and procedures, which are critical in cultivating relationships, promoting safety, and providing the foundation of a system of care and nurturing interactions (Gunawan et al., 2019; Howell et al., 2019; Von Dohlen et al., 2019). When middle school students have experienced detrimental life events, they become distrustful and can respond negatively to others (Gunawan et al., 2019; Myers et al., 2017). This causes a deficiency in their capacity to experience proactive, meaningful relationships and feel safe at school (Myers, et al., 2017). Teachers who extend empathy to students set the foundation for a safe and productive learning environment, that facilitate the chance for their students to engage in higher-

level cognitive activities, academic independence, and opportunities to exhibit socially appropriate behavior (Frydman & Mayor, 2017; Lai et al., 2015).

Having norms and routines are paramount, especially for middle school students, and even more so to those who have been impacted by trauma (Gunawan et al., 2019; Knight et al., 2019). Consistent routines establish expectancy and create an environment of safety. In a research study by Lauren Dotson Davis (2019), she expounds that middle school teachers should take actionable steps to develop a safe and supportive learning environment for traumatized middle school students. Young adolescents in middle school benefit greatly from an inviting, safe, inclusive environment that supports their needs and encourages their desire to be transparent about their concerns (Dotson Davis, 2019). Explicit teaching strategies and techniques that help to illustrate the extension of empathy, allow middle school teachers to present themselves as caring and middle school students to feel comfortable, and not threatened that by the fear of retraumatization (Dotson Davis, 2019; Frydman & Mayor, 2017).

Middle School Teachers and Teaching Responsible Decision Making

Middle school teachers who extend empathy to their students are intentionally incorporating Social and emotional learning techniques, which ultimately will be an impactful resource used when connecting to students who have experienced trauma (Frydman & Mayor, 2017). Another valuable social and emotional learning competency to focus on when seeking activities for students who have been influenced as a result of Adverse Childhood Experiences, which generally precipitates trauma, is the ability to make sound decisions (Knight et al., 2019). Responsible decision-making is one of the five competencies of Social and emotional learning (CASEL 2018). The ability to make sound decisions is largely based on how the brain processes

information and as a result, how an individual reaches conclusion regarding actions that should ensue (Boullier & Blair, 2018).

Boullier and Blair (2018) conducted a study on Adverse Childhood Experiences' neurobiological impacts on cognitive abilities and behavior. This study explains that stress caused by ACEs influences the hippocampus, prefrontal cortex, and amygdala. The hippocampus determines the ability to recall information, the prefrontal cortex is related to the ability to organize, control impulse behavior, and change behavior, and the amygdala controls the ability to process feelings and regulation. Memory, executive functioning, and self-management are critical in how information is processed to make sound decisions.

Therefore, any disruption in the area of focus, comprehension, or self-regulation may contribute to students having difficulty making responsible decisions, which may lead to problems in learning environments (Dotson Davis, 2019; Roseby & Gascoigne, 2021). Students who have been exposed to trauma are increasingly even more challenged academically and behaviorally because of their impairment to thinking reasonably and make ethical and constructive choices about personal and social behavior (Richards et al., 2019). In a quantitative, descriptive correlation research study regarding middle school students' emotional competencies, it was concluded that middle school teachers have a great contribution in helping adolescent students develop emotional awareness and responsible decision-making skills (Gonzalez et al, 2020). Middle school teachers, however, require the necessary professional development to successfully implement effective, supportive social and emotional learning practices, such as empathy and responsible decision making, to assist middle school students who have been exposed to traumatic events (Barnett et al., 2018; Chafouleas et al., 2016; Cummings et al., 2017; Knight et al., 2019).

Middle School Teachers and Trauma-Informed Professional Development

Numerous studies have investigated the many benefits of the implementation of trauma-informed practices for students (Chafouleas et al., 2016; Cummings et al., 2017; Knight et al., 2019). Research supports that established, stable, and caring relationships create an emotion of acceptance that is critical for all students, however, it is exceptionally vital for the healing of students who have been exposed to trauma (Barnett et al., 2018; Cummings et al., 2017). Although teacher leaders may acknowledge that many students have experienced some sort of trauma, or have been exposed to detrimental situations, many cannot still use supportive techniques and methods, such as trauma-informed practices (Diab & Schultz, 2021; Goodwin, 2020). Trauma-informed practices in schools have a significant impact on improving students' academic, emotional and behavioral performance (McIntyre et al., 2019; Mikolajczyk & Grochowski, 2018; Zelazo & Lyons, 2012). Teachers must be properly trained, however, on practices and methods to use when dealing with students who have experienced trauma for there to be authentic, observable actions that would lead to sustainable improvement overall (Dunn & Doolittle, 2020; McIntyre et al., 2019).

The implementation of trauma-informed practices significantly improves students' academic competency and higher-order thinking skills (Stokes & Brunzell, 2019). Students who have experienced trauma typically have lower IQs and are not performing at optimal capacity in reading comprehension and writing (Berardi & Morton, 2017; Stone, 2019). Trauma impacts cognitive abilities and therefore hinders students from processing new information, and synthesizing prior knowledge to apply in a new context (Tishelman et al., 2010). The integration of trauma-informed Social and emotional learning methods helps facilitate students' independence with learning, with the understanding their previous experiences influence their

thinking (Klapp et al., 2017). Durlak et al. (2011) suggested that techniques such as activating student's voices, implementing brain breaks, establishing conducive learning environments, and delivering explicit instruction opportunities help students process information in segments, assisting them not get overwhelmed with information, which may cause the student to become frustrated. Due to the cognitive delay that students who have experienced trauma experience, this is exceptionally beneficial. Various research studies have confirmed that these Social and emotional learning techniques are helpful because it gives students the chance to use their previous experiences to relate to information they are receiving (Gordon et al., 2016; Klapp et al., 2017). Implementation of these techniques can be supportive and nurturing to students and help cultivate their capacity to be empathetic to others. Gordon et al. (2016) and Klapp et al. (2017) supported an increase in academic performance for students who have endured ACEs, as a result of intentional efforts by the teacher to instruct students through a trauma-informed lens.

Trauma-informed practices not only help students who have endured Adverse Childhood Experiences with their need to perform academically, but it supports their emotional deficiencies as well, which substantially contribute to improved behavior (Harris, 2018; Sacks & Murphey, 2020). Ample evidence exists that students who have experienced trauma due to Adverse Childhood Experiences have an increased likelihood to have discipline issues (Blodgett & Lanigan, 2018; Harris, 2018; Sacks & Murphey, 2020). Students who have endured trauma have behavioral idiosyncrasies that include impulsivity, combative responses, aggressive reactions, and defiant approaches (Dutil, 2020; Sklad, 2012). These actions are generally nonconductive to learning environments and violate the student code of conduct. As a result, teachers document such disruptive behavior and willful noncompliance, which transforms into a discipline referral (Dutil, 2020; Harris, 2018; Sklad, 2012). Campus administration has erroneously responded to

students who have experienced ACEs' noncompliant attitude as intentional and have provided exclusionary discipline placements as a response to the nonconformance (Stokes & Brunzell, 2019). This can be damaging for the student because simply removing them from the environment does not address the emotional deficiencies that cause the conforming behavior (Herrenkohl et al., 2019; Stokes & Brunzell, 2019). Trauma-informed practices, however, establish an intentional approach to address disruptive behavior due to trauma (Howell et al., 2019; Stokes & Brunzell, 2019). Durlak et al. (2011) explained that teachers who use trauma-informed practices such as positive affirmations, threshold greetings, teachable moments, and thoughtful modeling, partner with students to help strengthen their ability to use self-management strategies and improve their behavior. Using trauma-informed practices positively impacts student behavior.

Trauma is extremely prevalent in middle school students (Crosby et al., 2020). By the time students get to middle school, a few of them have experienced one or several Adverse Childhood Experiences (Blodgett & Lanigan, 2018; Harris, 2018). An overwhelming amount of evidence supports that the application of trauma-informed practices will significantly improve students who have endured trauma behavior and academic performance (Blodgett & Lanigan, 2018; Crosby et al., 2020; Harris, 2018; Mikolajczyk & Grochowski, 2018). Unfortunately, teachers lack the necessary skills to effectively utilize trauma-informed practices (Stokes & Brunzell, 2019). Middle school teachers who have seen improvement in their students' performance after their use of Social and emotional learning as a framework have shared their need for ongoing professional development (Dunn & Doolittle, 2020; Katz et al., 2012; Pawlo et al., 2019; Von Dohlen et al., 2019). Professional development gives embedded support, required

resources, and an outline for accountability and data to gauge the effectiveness of the training (Goodwin-Glick, 2017).

Trauma-informed professional development explains how students who have experienced trauma think, behave, react and engage with others (Goodwin-Glick, 2017). Middle school teachers who understand how trauma influences their students' academic performance and behavior can provide prescriptive support and direction, ultimately helping their students to have positive experiences at school (Von Dohlen et al., 2019). As a result of middle school teachers participating in trauma-informed professional development, the likelihood of students performing poorly in school because they were negatively impacted by trauma, decreases (Goodwin-Glick, 2017).

Summary

The literature review served as the basis to support the need for a study exploration of strategies of teacher leaders for responding to students experiencing trauma. The Chapter 2 literature review included information on the theoretical framework of SEL, the impact of trauma, and trauma and how it impacts middle school students. The section on trauma and how it impacts middle school students focused specifically on the importance of middle school teacher and student relationships, middle school teachers and empathy, and middle school teachers and trauma-informed professional development.

Chapter 3 presents the components of the chosen research design and methodology for this qualitative case study. The chapter begins by reaffirming the problem of practice, the purpose of the study, and research questions. I plan to detail the reason for the selected research design and the method in which the study will be carried out. The chapter will describe the

sample population and how data were collected, analyzed, and used. In addition, Chapter 3 will speak to the limitations of the study.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative instrumental case study was to explore strategies for supporting students experiencing trauma as perceived of teacher leaders as framed by CASEL's social and emotional learning theory. A qualitative approach permitted an in-depth comprehension of methods teachers implemented to help support students who have experienced Adverse Childhood Experiences and subsequently have endured trauma as a result. This chapter is organized into 13 sections: (a) purpose of the study and research questions, (b) research design ad method, (c) population/sample, (d) sample, (e) data collection and instrumentation, (f) data analysis, (g) trustworthiness, (h) researcher's role, (i) ethical considerations, (j) assumption, (k) limitations, (l) delimitations, and (m) summary.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore strategies for supporting students experiencing trauma as perceived of teacher leaders as framed by CASEL's social and emotional learning theory. For the purposes of this study teacher leaders were defined as educators who had responsibilities beyond the classroom while teaching, who modeled strategies and influence others, and who shared pedagogical and classroom management strategies to help improve classroom and campus climate and culture (Angelle & DeHart, 2016; Collinson & Tourish, 2015; Wenner & Campbell, 2017).

Research Questions

The research questions were designed to discover how trauma-informed practices that were influenced by SEL competencies answered the following questions:

RQ1: How do teacher leaders teach empathy to students to help them respond to trauma?

RQ2: How do teacher leaders build trusting relationships with students to help them respond to trauma?

RQ3: How do teacher leaders empower students to make responsible decisions to help them respond to trauma?

RQ4: How do teacher leaders support self-awareness of students to help them respond to trauma?

RQ5: How do teacher leaders teach self-management to students to help them respond to trauma?

Research Design

Qualitative research designs are used when the researcher is collecting and analyzing data to answer inquiries based on select questions presented on a topic (Flick, 2007). It seeks to answer directly stated questions. The qualitative research method is not linear or sequential and explains individuals' situations and experiences (Devers & Frankel, 2000). Aspects of the foundation of qualitative research designs that are relevant to this study were natural settings, personal contact and insight, inductive analysis and multiple sources of data (Hatch, 2002; Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Ravitch and Carl (2019) described qualitative research as both dynamic and interactive. The facets of qualitative research, specifically the problem that was highlighted from the literature, organization of research questions, conduction of data collection, and the analysis of data, were ongoing. Per Kozleski (2017), qualitative research is beneficial for highlighting the context of experiences and viewpoints of individuals. The researcher thinks "analytically on their data as they collect it, developing working hypotheses that can be tested through interviews and observations during the study to rule out some lines of inquiry while advancing others" (p. 25).

This study allowed me to explore practices of teacher leaders who supported students who had experienced trauma. Researchers support that qualitative research is comprehending the input from the participants' point of view, and not the researcher's beliefs or perspective (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

There are five types of approaches for qualitative research deigns: narrative, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study (Creswell et al., 2007). Case study was the most appropriate selection for this research because it sought to explore how teacher leaders' implemented strategies to address students with trauma. This study utilized a qualitative instrumental case study, because it served the purpose of illuminating an issue (Creswell, 2013). The topic highlighted was strategies teacher leaders implemented to support students experiencing trauma. Arguably, case study was the more suitable for qualitative research because of the detailed review of intricate issues (Bhatta, 2018). Guetterman et al. (2018) noted that collective instrumental case studies involve individuals who associate with a specific setting and individuals permit researchers to comprehend more than what is initially easily transparent. Qualifications, including the number of years the participants have been in their role as a teacher leader, and their prescriptive references to social and emotional learning competencies to implement trauma-informed practices, were used to select individuals to interview. A characteristic of case studies that align with this research was that case studies are bounded or limited, which helped with establishing that the research is not too broad (Baxter & Jack, 2008). This study was limited in its time, location, context and definition (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2003). Boundedness permitted what the research focused on, and what was not considered (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

Population/Sample

A study population is the group of elements from whom the sample is collected (Leavy, 2014). The population for this study were educators who implement trauma informed practices. The sample of this study consisted of nine teacher leaders who were in metropolitan middle schools in the U.S. South (see Table 1). Teacher leaders were recruited because they understood the influence of trauma and provided support to ease the detrimental impact trauma had on students (Von Dohlen et al., 2019). Study participants included educators based on criterion reference selection, participants reflected specific characteristics to engage in the study (Roberts, 2015). Criterion reference for this study included:

- individuals who identified as teacher leaders who have received recognition for their excellence from their school district, state or other source;
- individuals who taught three to five years, and/or self-identify as working with students who have experienced trauma; and
- teacher leaders who were individuals who had previously taught in a middle school setting, but currently serve as a district level support of middle school teachers implementing trauma-informed practices.

Table 1

Teacher Leader Participants

Teacher leader	Position	Female/Male	Grade taught/Currently teaching
Maddie	Teacher Behavior Specialist	Female	6th, 7th, 8th
Averi	SEL Counselor	Female	6th
Wundershun	Teacher Behavior Specialist	Female	7th, 8th
Xavier	Intensive Mental Health Specialist	Female	6th, 7th, 8th
Lawson	ELA teacher	Female	7th
LilSis	Science teacher	Female	6th
Ivy	Speech teacher	Female	7th, 8th
PVA	Math teacher	Female	8th
Fortitude	ELA teacher	Female	6th

Snowball sampling strategy was used because participants who are currently implementing trauma-informed methods were aware of other teacher leaders who are using similar implementation methods and have had success. Snowball sampling is based on trust because if the initial participants who are questioned trust the researcher, and understand that the reason for the study is important, they may be more inclined to identify other potential participants and encourage them to participate in the study as well (Patton, 2015). This type of sampling was relevant to this study because teacher leaders who trusted me to use the results of the study for a useful purpose, such as increase attention to the implementation of trauma-informed practices to support students who have been exposed to traumatic events, were more likely to seek other teacher leaders to participate. Individuals who were well connected in a group, such as teacher leaders, were good source of information, and sought others who were as well (Leavy, 2014). Naderifar et al. (2017) explained that snowball sampling is a method for

qualitative research and a method of collecting information to retrieve information from a prescribed group of individuals.

All individuals interviewed provided information which reflected their credentials as a teacher leader. Participants chose a pseudonym of their choice to establish confidentiality. Additionally, the data collected for this study maintained on a personal device. Files were encrypted to prohibit unauthorized access. Document retention policy will be followed to destroy data after a specified period.

Data Collection and Instrumentation

The researcher plays an intimate role in qualitative studies and the process of data collection (Anyan, 2013; Chenail, 2011). Methods of data collection should always be determined due to their capacity to adequately address the purpose of the research and assist with answering the research questions (Leavy, 2014). The data collection for this research study were interviews of teacher leaders in middle schools in the South. Interviews were the primary source of data for this qualitative research study and based on a guided protocol construct built on the research questions (See Appendix A). Interviews are critical because they permit the other person's perspective to become transparent (Patton, 2015).

I conducted an expert review of the guided protocol, which provided feedback from experts in the field of trauma-informed practices for teacher leaders (Hoover et al., 2018). I asked individuals who served in a supervisory capacity of teacher leaders what area of focus were most critical when dealing with students who have been exposed to traumatic events. The use of expert-guided protocol confirmed if the questions were appropriately worded to increase the likelihood of meaningful responses.

The interviews were administered via the online conferencing system Zoom to conduct research and collect data. Zoom has embedded features that propels its potential appeal for qualitative research (Archibald et al., 2019). Additional data collection were artifacts and field notes from follow up conversations with participants. These artifacts include, but are not limited to, information on district web-sites that relate to trauma-informed practices, professional development agendas on the topic of strategies for teachers to address trauma of students, classroom activities used by participants to support students who had endured trauma, and lesson plans reflecting the implementation of SEL strategies related to trauma, I reached data saturation after the sixth interview, but completed nine interviews to establish robust data on the topic. Interviews varied in length between 20 and 40 minutes each. In addition, data collection included field notes, which will comprised of thoughts and observations during the interviews.

Data Analysis

Cho and Trent (2006) explained data analysis as "summarizing and organizing" (p. 652). I reviewed data compiled from interviews of teacher leaders which conducted via Zoom, read and reviewed. Transcripts of the interviews were transcribed through a transcription service Rev, documented and reviewed for data analysis. Upon the completion of the interviews and the transcription of the feedback from the participants, I reviewed the information and aligned the responses to the research questions (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2003).

Once the interviews were concluded and the data are collected, the information will be analyzed using the constant comparative method. I identified incidents, events and activities and compare them to information on the implementation of trauma-informed practices to reach saturation. Constant comparison is the process of analyzing, reanalyzing, and comparing new data to preexisting data (Birks et al., 2011; Urquhart, 2012). The constant comparative method

constitutes the foundation of qualitative analysis (Boeije, 2002). Constant comparison is a data analysis process which contributes to the validity of the research and focuses on the subjective experiences of individuals (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2011). Data analysis in qualitative research involves the organization of the data, next condensing the data into themes through coding, then ultimately representing the data through discussion (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Upon completion of the interviews of this study, the data were collected, transcribed, manually coded, and analyzed to determine themes. Initially, I planned to use the web-based data software, Dedoose, however, after thorough constant comparison, and detailed manually coded data analyses, in addition to saturation being met after the sixth interview, I felt the themes presented reflected a clear depiction of recommend strategies for supporting students experiencing trauma as perceived by teacher leaders framed in CASEL's social and emotional learning theory.

The most significant influence identified by researchers is its capacity to provide material indication of the data analysis process thus firming the credibility and trustworthiness of the study (Gobel et al., 2012). Trustworthiness is the assurance of the results of the study (Elo & Kyngas, 2008). The foundation of qualitative research requires that researchers ensure specific measures to establish confidence of the study (Creswell, 2009). Interviews served as the primary source of data, and artifacts and field notes served as secondary data sources. Primary sources are the data that will be provided directly from the main source, whereas secondary data sources are information that has already been gathered through the primary source and made available to the researcher (Johnston, 2017).

Trustworthiness

Polit and Beck (2014) defined trustworthiness as the degree of confidence in data, interpretation, and methods used to solidify the quality of a research study. Leavy (2014)

confirmed that there may be various ways to describe trustworthiness, but it simply speaks to the quality of the study as a whole and the difficulty of the methodology. Kyngas et al. (2020) listed the five most relevant terms for establishing trustworthiness are credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and authenticity. Credibility can be defined as assurance in the validity of the findings, transferability describes the findings applicability in other areas, dependability infers that the findings are consistent, and confirmability details the extent to the neutrality of the findings. Credibility was confirmed through the triangulation of information used in the study (Finfgeld-Connett, 2010).

For this research study, a triangulation of sources included interviews of study participants, as well as artifacts and field notes, such as lesson plans, classroom activities used by participants, and district website information on training notifications related to trauma information practices. An itemized method of ensuring credibility to ascertain that participants who were interviewed had an understanding that can contribute to the phenomenon of supporting students who have experienced trauma were used (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Results of the study confirmed through vignettes from the interviews highlighted important aspects from the study (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). A comparison of the vignettes from the interviews and artifacts were used to substantiate the use of strategies used by teacher leaders to help students who have been exposed to trauma. It is imperative to confirm I had no bias, which is established through confirmability.

Confirmability was done through the transcription of interview content through coding. Trustworthiness is exceptionally important in qualitative research studies. Customary schemes to obtain trustworthiness involved the collection of data processes detailed before that were systematic, the illustration of the data through robust explanations, researcher's positionality as

outlined in Chapter 1, and researcher's bias (Glasser & Strauss, 2012; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Morrow, 2005; Yilmaz, 2013).

Trustworthiness also includes triangulation of data, which refers to the various uses of data sources in qualitative research and establishes an all-inclusive understanding of phenomena (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015). Member checking was conducted which was the act of revising the transcript with the study participants to guarantee the clarifications and findings were consistent with their words and meaning (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Qualitative research offers robust and poignant information about individuals' personal experiences, however, there must be a guided protocol when interviewing participants when retrieving this information (Majid et al., 2017). Prior to conducting the actual study interviews, the guided protocol underwent expert review to assure that the right questions were being asked in the right way. Yates and Leggett (2016) explained that interviews are chosen when there is a chance for follow up of compelling comments are warranted.

Researcher's Role

For over 25 years, I have worked in the K-12 public school system. I have served in the capacity as a teacher, counselor, assistant principal, associate principal, principal, and district coordinator. In various roles, I have observed the significance of positive relationships of students who have experienced trauma, and their teachers, or other adults in the learning environment. Unfortunately, I have also witnessed the detriment that is caused when teachers do not recognize the significance trauma has on student behavior, and subsequently trigger students to experience retraumatization, or conclude this behavior is intentional and beyond the students' control. As a result, an overwhelming number of students receive exclusionary disciplinary

placements, and do not receive the necessary support to independently address their emotional deficiencies and expectations of being a student in an organized learning environment.

I have been trained in skills necessary to carry out the designed study. As an administrator, I have interviewed countless applicants for various positions. Therefore, I recognize my own bias as a means of reporting less biased results, which alleviated possible harmful effects of predeterminations that may influence the research process, also known as bracketing (Tufford & Newman, 2012). My professional skills and my knowledge regarding the success of authentic implementation of trauma-informed practices to support students was beneficial to this research.

Ethical Considerations

Encountering ethical issues during a research study is inevitable (Orb et al., 2000; Sanjari et al., 2014). Researchers state the typical concerns with ethics are related to informed consent, trust, and confidentiality (Ryen, 2011; Sanjari et al., 2014). The ethical considerations were tackled in this study were the university Institutional Review Board (IRB) and approval before interacting with individuals were interviewed or collection of data. Information detailing the nature of the study was reviewed with participants, as well as the goals and purpose of the study, and how the data were gathered and used (Sanjari et al., 2014). Upon their consent, participants were informed they can withdraw free of their own volition at any time, and participants waivered written consent, but did acknowledge consent verbally (Ryen, 2011). The Office for Human Research Protection (2016) states that research cannot be conducted on human's subjects without receiving consent before the study begins. The research study did not compromise the safety of any participants and was not unethical in any fashion. Confidentiality was discussed with the participants. Participants were informed that I will not publish, display, or use

identifiable information of participants. A relationship with openness and trust was cultivated with the participants (Orb et al., 2000).

Assumptions

For the purpose of this study, I assumed that the participants answered honestly and transparently to the interview questions. I also assumed that the research participants authentically shared their experiences with students who have been exposed to trauma, prior to their implementation of trauma-informed practices, and how the use of trauma-informed practices improved student academic performance, behavior, and the student-teacher relationship.

Limitations

Limitations of a qualitative research study are those identifiable traits of design of methodology that persuade the interpretation of the findings from the research (Price & Murnan, 2004). Limitations are factors that may potentially have a negative effect to the results of the study, and the researcher has no control, which restricts the generalizations of findings (Roberts, 2015). For example, in this study, I had no control over the level of trauma students who interacted with the teacher leaders experienced, which impacted how effective their implementation of trauma-informed practices was. I had no control over the specific type of trauma-informed practices the participants used or its level of success. Mays and Pope (1995) shared that qualitative research is naturally limited because it lacks generalizability, and it produces significant amount of information on a limited number of settings.

Delimitations

Delimitations are limitations which are intentionally placed by the researcher, restrict the scope, and explain the boundaries of the study, so factors are controlled to impact the results

(Simon, 2011; Terrell, 2016). Delimiting factors for this study included the requirements for participant participation, which were individuals who identified as teacher leaders by having received recognition for their excellence from their school, district, state, or other source, taught three to five years, and/or self-identify as working with students who have experienced trauma. An additional delimitation factor was that teacher leaders for this study were defined as individuals who have previously taught in a middle school setting, but currently serve as a district level support of middle school teachers implementing trauma-informed practices.

Summary

In Chapter 3, I described and established the reason for design of this instrumental collective instrumental case study. In this chapter I discussed the criteria that was used to determine study participants. Methods of data collection and data analysis were also discussed in this chapter. My bias, as well as ethical considerations, assumptions, limitations and delimitations of the study were presented. The goal of Chapter 4 is to present the study's findings.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative instrumental case study was to explore strategies for supporting students experiencing trauma as perceived by teacher leaders framed in CASEL's social and emotional learning theory. This chapter is organized in terms of the five research questions and describes the findings from the data analysis. The participants of the study included teacher leaders from three public school districts and two charter school systems in Texas. The voluntary sample consisted of nine educators: five who were current middle school teachers, and four who had previously taught in a middle school setting, but at the time of the study served as district-level support for middle school teachers implementing trauma-informed practices.

Research Question 1: Teaching Empathy

RQ1 explored how teacher leaders teach empathy to students, and how the implementation of specific strategies caused them to have concern for students who have experienced trauma. When asked what professional development they have attended to help them use strategies to establish empathy for students who have experienced trauma, seven out of the nine teacher leaders mentioned attending or facilitating professional development that focused solely on trauma-informed practices. Maddie, Averi, Xavier, and Wundershun are all district support educators who help train teachers to implement supportive strategies to students who have experienced difficult life situations. Each shared the importance of professional development and the intentional use of strategies that encourages the concern of other's feelings and experiences. In fact, when questioned why trauma-informed professional development is so important when addressing students who have experienced trauma, Wundershun explained:

> I have used trauma-informed strategies in my classroom when I was a middle school teacher, and I know it works. I enthusiastically share with teachers the effectiveness of trauma-informed practices to establish empathy toward others because I have seen how it helped me be more understanding of students' life's situations.

The consistent themes regarding strategies which helped these teacher leaders to teach empathy to students as a result of attending trauma-informed professional development are: implementing inquiry activities, integrating social and emotional learning in academics by providing explicit instruction, and creating social contracts in the classroom.

Implementing Inquiry Activities

Teacher leaders shared they felt empathy for their students when they knew more about their background. Eight out of nine of the teacher leaders interviewed mentioned using some sort of activity that allowed them to get to know more about their students, or inquiry activities. When asked how she approached establishing empathy for students, Maddie said when she used some sort of "get to know you" activity with her students, she was able to provide a safe environment for the students to share about themselves, and she in turn, shared with her students about her background and personality. Maddie explained that she encouraged the students to share at their comfort level, so they would not feel uncomfortable being open and honest about their past experiences. She also used her experience with this strategy to currently help middle school teachers have empathy for students. As a teacher behavior specialist, Maddie is responsible for providing positive behavior support and trauma-informed strategies to teachers to implement with their students. Maddie expressed that inquiry activities help students build a commonality with their experiences. She emphasized that students who have experienced trauma

may feel a feeling of ease if they know they are not the only individual that has endured something they have gone through as well.

Like Maddie, Averi felt her use of inquiry activities helped her students build connections with others, and it helped shaped her support for her students. Averi provided Figure 2, illustrating the inquiry activity she used as a middle school teacher, and currently shares with teachers to help establish empathy with students and even encourage students to be more understanding of others' experiences.

Figure 2

Inquiry Activity

Averi detailed how this simple activity caused students who normally would not interact with others to become engaged and participatory in the activity. She explained:

> I would give students number 1-12. Then I would call out a number. I would then pull a number and have the student with the corresponding number share out. If another student has the same favorite answer, then they need to say, "me too."

Averi stated although this activity seemed simple, it immediately established connections with other students. The other questions, specifically the question "something not a lot of people know about you," opens an avenue for students to share. "The favorite questions should come first," shared Averi. "This sets the tone to go deeper," she added.

All five of the teacher leaders who are currently teaching in middle school settings explained using inquiry activities during the first week of school. LilSis provided an artifact—a copy of her weekly lesson plan—of her implementation of the inquiry activity she uses titled "About Me" (see Figure 3). LilSis explained that she used this as a way to gauge how she should support students throughout the school year. LilSis explained, "I allow them to share at their comfort level. Forcing doesn't work." Lawson, Ivy, and Fortitude all mentioned the significance of inquiry activities as well that encourage students to open up based on their comfort, allowing others to know about them. Fortitude specifically shared why she uses inquiry activities. She claimed, "This lays the foundation for having an empathetic classroom environment because it is surprising how many people have gone through similar situations; even me." Based on the responses and artifacts from the teacher leaders, inquiry activities are pivotal with establishing empathy for students who have experienced trauma, as well as assisting students to be empathetic to others.

Figure 3

Lesson Plan with Inquiry Activity

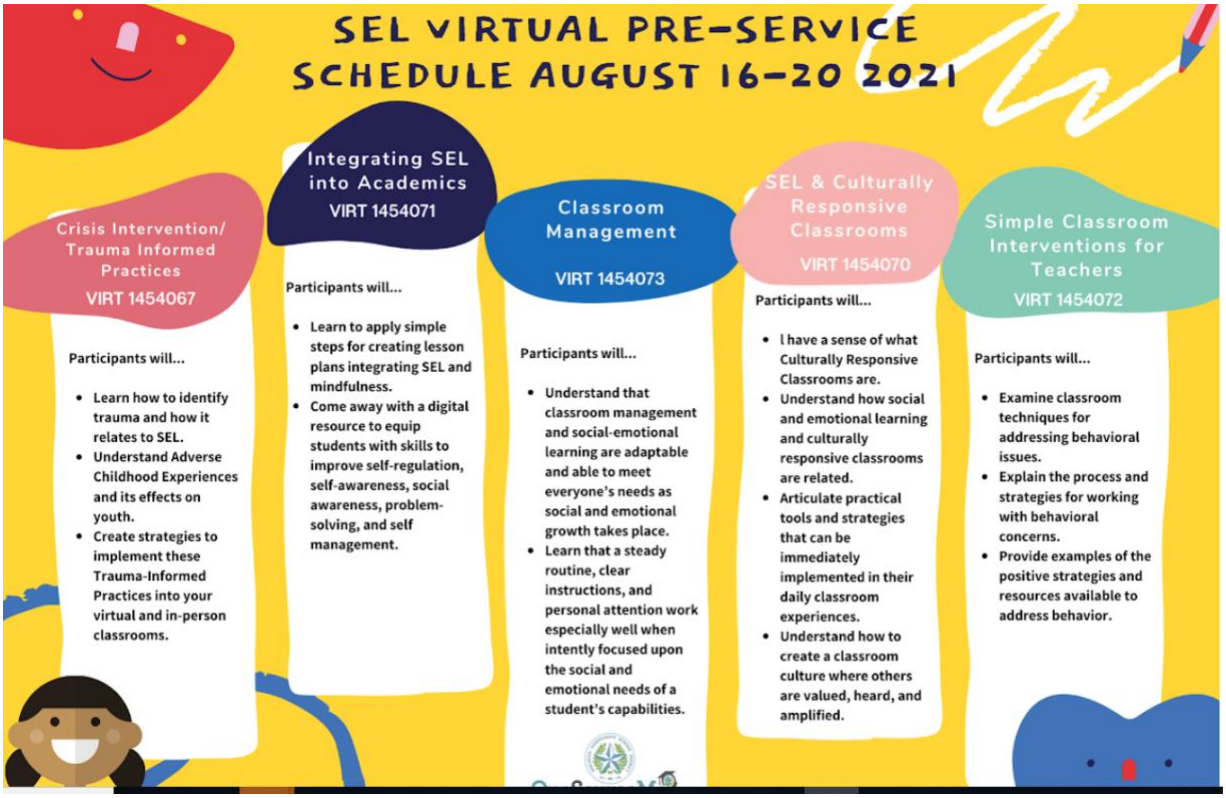
	Monday 8/9	Tuesday 8/10	Wednesday 8/11	Thursday 8/12	Friday 8/13
Content & Language Objectives **Sentence Stems**		TLW: setup Interactive notebooks and demonstrate routines for daily science activities. LO: use visuals and contextual supports to construct their personal interactive notebook.	TLW: create a Circle Map on Safe Science Practices. LO: record information on safety in the classroom when conducting labs.	TLW: Explain the importance of Safe Science Practices. LO: Record and Speak about safe science practices and safety equipment.	TLW: Create a product that will summarize and explain Safety in the classroom. LO: Write and Speak about the safety in the classroom using words such Mask, Gloves, and measuring
Lessons/Ideas 5Es Model	**(Engage, Explore, Explain, Extend, Evaluate)**	**(Engage, Explore, Explain, Extend, Evaluate)**	**(Engage, Explore, Explain, Extend, Evaluate)**	**(Engage, Explore, Explain, Extend, Evaluate)**	**(Engage, Explore, Explain, Extend, Evaluate)**
Vocabulary: Laboratory Safety Safety Equipment Scientific Tools Quiz-Safety & Scientific **Assessments:**		**Starter:** Present About me Prezi. Have students introduce themselves. (name and one thing they want to share) Set up your science classroom and interactive notebook. Model interactive notebook format for students and explain its significance. Set- up science notebooks with students. (Refer to ALIEF ISD Science Notebook Essentials - Schoology). Students will be using their notebook before, during, and after	**Starter:** Have students share one thing that makes them happy & one that makes them upset. **Map Question: What is lab safety?** In their Science interactive notebooks, students will create a Thinking Map to organize their thinking about Science Safety (a Circle Map is a great map for brainstorming ideas and thoughts about a topic.)	**Starter:** Introduce mood meters and how we will use them. Edusmart> Scientific Investigation & Reasoning: Safe Practices & Safety Equipment	**Stater**: Create treatment agreement Students will create a bookmark, bumper sticker or comic strip promoting lab safety with a summary explaining its significance.Writing Connection: A group of students want to observe and measure leaves from an oak tree. "What tools might they need?"

Integration of Social Emotional Learning in Academics: Explicit Instruction

Adolescent years can be difficult for students, because the change from elementary to middle school can cause a decrease in motivation (Neth et al., 2019). Five of the nine teacher leaders interviewed are all in the same district and required to attend training on integrating emotional learning in academics. Documentation of the required training is posted on their district web page on their district site and the social and emotional learning department's web page (see Figure 4).

Figure 4

Integrating Social and Emotional Learning in Academics Flyer



This training focuses on the integration of social and emotional learning and provide the strategy of using explicit instruction, which helps students make a connection to what they are learning and their own personal life experiences. Averi, Xavier, Wundershun, as well as Maddie, all shared how effective this strategy is when dealing with students who have endured trauma. Students will feel comfortable sharing their experiences when they can connect it to what they are learning," explained Xavier. Wundershun believes implementing explicit instruction is a powerful tool in helping the teacher acquire information about students, and as a result the teacher can determine the best way to support students. Xavier detailed that she encourages teachers to use explicit instruction but warns them that they should be mindful of students' experiences when they connect their experiences to instruction. Xavier recounted:

> Students who have experienced traumatic experiences may or may not be triggered when a teacher implements explicit instruction. My experience has been that it is effective because students feel they have a safe place to share what they have been through and relate it to something else [their instruction].

Xavier also explained that the use of explicit instruction should be student centered, and explicit instruction should engage students in discussion on how a competency plays out in in their own lives. This strategy helps students feel comfort beyond their trauma and be open to engage in helpful strategies implemented by their teachers.

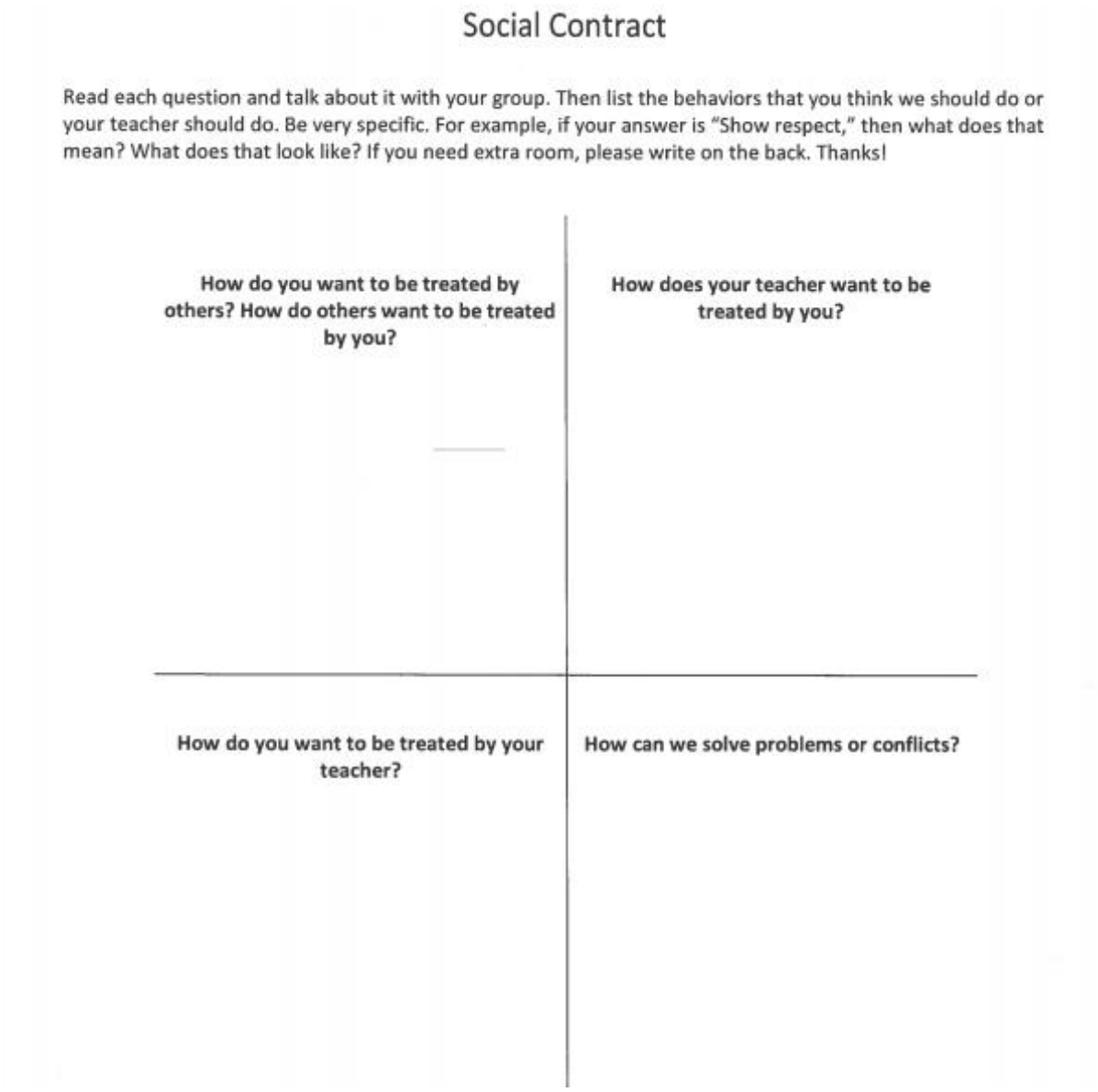
Creating Social Contracts

All five teacher leaders participating in this study who are currently teaching in the classroom shared they implemented some form of social contract to encourage students to be empathetic to others. Teacher leaders shared that they explained to their students how they as the teacher set the tone in their classroom by not tolerating hurtful words or actions to others. Lawson shared how she approached the conversation about social contracts with her students. Lawson stated that she simply asked her students, “How do you want to be treated?” She explained how by merely asking this one question caused students to consider how they want to be treated, but also this allowed students to hear how other students want to be treated as well. As a result, an understanding of empathy of occurs. Lawson also shared that she encouraged her class to take into consideration that not all students have the same experiences as they do and that should be considered when they interact or approach classmates, and other individuals. A social contract allows individuals to create shared values while recognizing the feelings and emotions of others.

Fortitude and Ivy each provided examples of social contracts they used with their students to create an empathetic environment in the classroom. Fortitude shared an example of an activity she used to implement the social contract strategy, which was a worksheet asking four questions on the topic of how an individuals want to be treated and how they should treat others (see Figure 5).

Figure 5

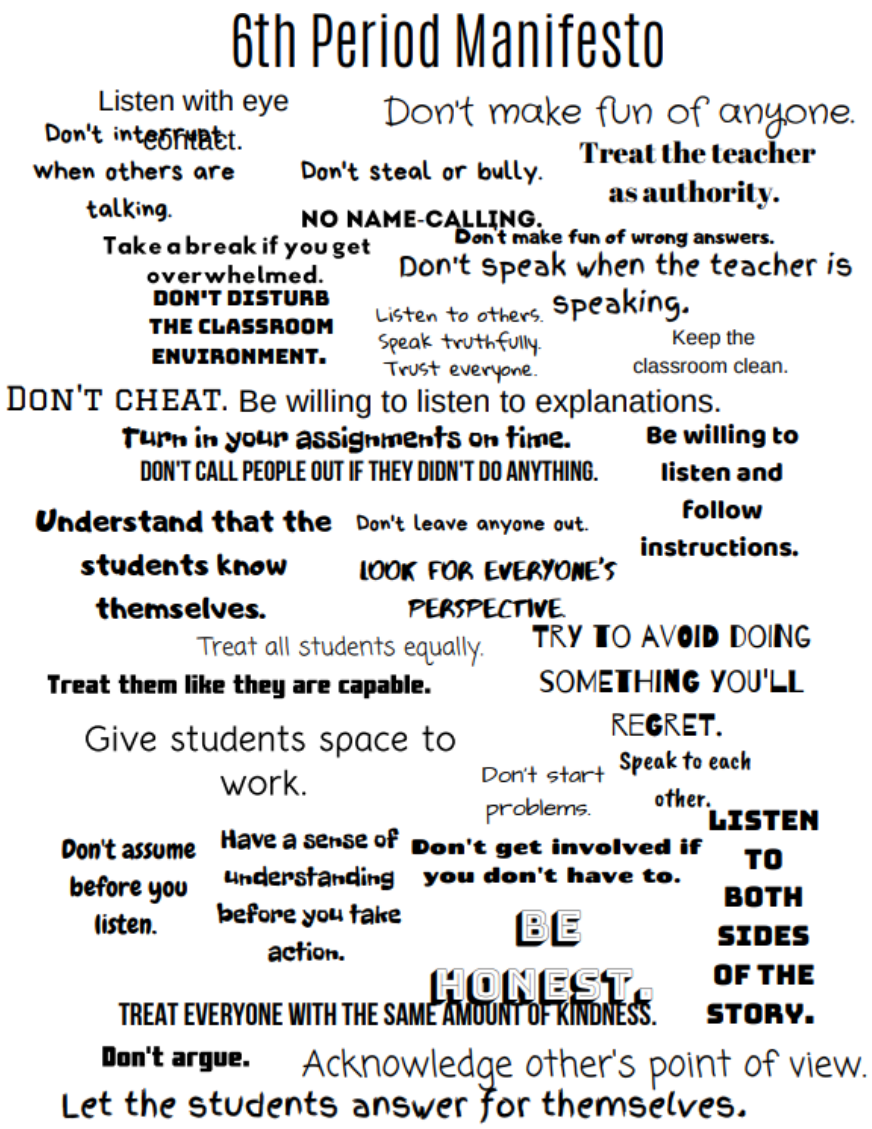
Social Contract



Fortitude explained that asking the questions about how you want to be treated should influence the teacher to be empathetic to a student's concerns and feelings. Likewise, she stated this question helps students who have experienced trauma verbalize what they are feeling and what they need. The artifact from Ivy is also an example of a social contract. The name of the activity is the class period manifesto (Figure 6).

Figure 6

6th Grade Manifesto



When implementing Figure 6, everyone is asked to share how they felt the class should collectively treat each other and state what value was important to them. Ivy felt this was a great exercise to encourage empathy, especially for students who have endured difficult times. She highlighted student feedback such as “do not assume before you listen,” “listen to both sides of the story,” and “do not make fun of anyone” - all create a nonjudgement zone. Ivy attributed the use of this strategy to what she learned in trauma-informed practices training. By using this strategy, she felt “even the student who has endured trauma has a voice.”

Study participants clearly indicated via their feedback to the interview question, and with artifacts, that trauma-informed practices professional development is critical when providing prescriptive support to students who have experienced traumatic situations. Specific strategies such as the use of inquiry activities, application of explicit instruction, and the implementation of social contracts help teacher leaders establish empathy and encourage students to be more understanding of others.

Research Question 2: Building Trusting Relationships

RQ 2 explored how teacher leaders established relationships with students who have experienced trauma to create safe learning environments. The nine teacher leaders interviewed all stated that safety is important when dealing with students who have endured trauma, but most importantly building relationships is critical to their interaction with students. The following findings shared by the participants as their experiences with building relationships with students who have experienced trauma included daily check-ins and the use of positive affirmations and conversations.

Daily Check-Ins

All nine participants shared the value in establishing a daily routine where the teacher conducted a check in with their students to determine their emotional well-being for the day. The participants agreed that check-ins foster a feeling of safety and help with building positive relationships with students. Averi shared that check-ins help create the tone of the classroom and allow teachers to survey the needs of individual students. Averi, as well as Maddie, Wundershun, and Xavier advocated that check-ins are extremely significant at the threshold or entry of the classroom. “Threshold greetings, are a wonderful way to check in, and are a great way to start the learning experience,” shared Wundershun. Threshold greetings are a form of check in where teachers greet students at the entry of the classroom with a general, or specific greeting. Maddie and Xavier stressed the importance of using threshold greetings with teachers seeking ways to build relationships with students. Maddie recounted:

> I have attended many trainings that stated the importance of greeting students at the door. When I train teachers, who implement strategies to support students who have experienced trauma, I share that establishing a welcoming environment is very important and should happen as soon the student walks in the classroom.

Xavier exclaimed that teachers build capacity and establish relationships when they greet students and check in before learning begins.

Participants who are currently teaching and shared their personal reasons for using threshold greetings to build relationships with students were PVA and Fortitude. PVA was transparent regarding her own experience with trauma. She said, “I was a student who endured trauma myself.” She clarified that she understood students who had been through difficult times because she had a hard time growing up as well. PVA recalled that she valued a positive safe

learning environment when she was a student, and that is what motivates her to create the same for her students. PVA shared:

> I want to give some students a different experience other than what they have at home. Some students have a hard life, and school is the safest place for them. Before they enter my classroom, we have a certain greeting. I do this because I want them to feel welcome and safe, and it helps me get to know them [the student] better.

Fortitude explained that she uses threshold check-ins because a student told her once that she was one of the only individuals who said hello to her, and it meant a lot. She commented, "I will never forget her sharing how important saying hello meant." Fortitude explained how valuable student feedback was and is the leading reason why she greets students at the door daily and uses this technique as her check in process.

While Averi, Wundershun, Maddie, Fortitude, PVA, and Xavier spoke specifically about threshold greetings as a form of check in used with students, Lawson, Ivy, and LilSis discussed various check in techniques they use to build relationships with students and create a safe environment. Lawson establishes a safe learning environment and check in by allowing students to give their emotion number based on a 1–5 scale (one being the lowest, and 5 being the highest). "I take note of who is responding and who isn't," Lawson explained. If a student consistently does not provide feedback or is often saying they are a 1 or a 2, Lawson follows up with a personal one on one with the student and asks if there is anything that is going on or how she can help. She acknowledged, "Following up with students privately, especially students who have endured trauma, is important." She believes that students are more open to sharing with her personally what was troubling them, and as a result, her students have positive relationships with her.

Ivy uses a thumbs up and thumbs down check in system. Ivy noted that she dedicates the first few minutes of class to ask students to give feedback if they are feeling a thumbs up, indicating good, or a thumbs down, indicating not good. She commented that she gives students the option if they want to share or not why they feel the way they do. Ivy had the following to say about her thumbs up/thumbs down check in routine:

> I let students share how they feel if they want to. I do not force them to. I feel students feel they can trust me when I let them share on their terms. They have also been times when students helped each other after a classmate openly shared how they felt.

LilSis shared a check in technique where she lets students use pictures, or song titles to describe how they are feeling. She noted, "Some students can't communicate well how they are feeling, but they can use a title of a song, or a picture to give me some clue what they are going through." When describing her check in technique, LilSis commented:

> I dedicate time to ask students how they are feeling. They can share only a picture or a title of a song. I call on student who want to share why they chose that picture or song. I can tell a lot by how students are feeling by what song title or picture they selected.

LilSis felt that her check-ins were more engaging during virtual learning. "It is easier to do these type of check-ins with students when they can place their responses in the chat," she said. LilSis emphasized that check-ins are impactful for all students, but especially for students who have experienced trauma because they feel someone cares and there is an avenue to reach out to a trusting adult if they need to do so.

The check in methods the participants recounted provide a way of establishing trust and building relationships as well as availing opportunities for students to explore how they felt and why. Participants used their check in methods to gauge the emotional needs of students and

responded accordingly. The implementation of this technique was beneficial to all students, but especially to students who endured traumatic experiences because it gave them a feeling of safety that a trusted adult cared how they felt.

Positive Affirmations and Conversations

Positive affirmations are positive statements that can be used to challenge negative thoughts, uplift, or encourage others. All five of the participants who currently teach in middle school classrooms stated they use positive affirmations with their students, especially with students they know who have endured trauma. When asked why she felt the use of positive affirmations were effective, Lawson shared:

> We were told in a training that we should be striving for a 5:1 ratio with positive affirmations. This means, for every correction we give a student, we need to give them 5 positive interactions. I can literally see certain students face light up when I tell them something nice.

PVA shared that her motivation for using positive affirmations was influenced by her own need to hear positive things growing up. As a product of traumatic experiences, PVA explained that she often went to school to hear something other than the negative words she would hear daily in her environment. Lawson shared that she tells the students, “I love you,” and believes it has a significant contribution to the students’ feeling of safety and her establishing positive relationships with them. Lawson pointed out that she has been more intentional with making sure that she says and posts positive affirmations because of the lack of personal connection due to virtual learning. Lawson commented that she is a hugger, and now since she cannot hug due to social distancing, she makes sure her students feel safe and loved through her words.

LilSis and Fortitude both shared they purposely engage in positive conversations with their students. For example, LilSis intentionally asks students to share something good that happened to them recently. She recalled a time when a student told her, “nothing good happened.” LilSis stated that instead of allowing the student to feel that nothing good was worth sharing, she helped him look at negative situations differently and was able to change some negatives into positives. LilSis stated this method is extremely impactful with students who have endured trauma. She explained that students who have endured trauma may only see the negative, and helping them to view things with a positive perspective, even if those things only exists while they are at school, can help tremendously.

Fortitude uses prescriptive praise, which is an extension to her use of positive affirmations. For example, Fortitude described that when a student answers something correctly, or performs a task with accuracy, she is specific with her positive praise to that student. “Instead of saying good job, I would say good job on your warm-up, Myles,” recalled Fortitude. She explained that when students exit her class, she engages them in positive conversations using positive affirmations and incorporate prescriptive praise as well. Fortitude commented:

> I would tell a student good job on a specific task. When my students leave the classroom, I would say, you are valued, you are celebrated, you are important, and other positive affirmations. If a student received prescriptive praise, I would ask them why they are valued? I encourage them to share the praise they received earlier.

Ivy engages students who have experienced traumatic situations by using positive affirmation because she does not want them to perpetually feel defined by what has happened to them in their past. Thus, she said, “I make sure I tell students who have experienced trauma good things, because they are usually told so many negative things.”

Positive affirmations and positive conversations have proven to be successful with the participants who currently teach middle school when dealing with students who have experienced trauma. This strategy focuses on sharing positive words and expressions with students to replace negative conversations and thought patterns that may exist due to the trauma.

Research Question 3: Responsible Decision Making

RQ 3 investigated how teacher leaders empower students to make responsible decisions to help them respond to trauma. Results of the interviews revealed three significant emergent themes: having reflective conversations, thoughtful modeling, and transparency.

Reflective Questioning

Five participants reflected on their implementation of reflective questioning with students as a successful technique to discuss the value of making good decisions and having appropriate personal and social behaviors. Each of these five participants recalled how they provided opportunities for students to reflect on poor decisions they have made. As their teacher, they would ask reflective questions, causing students to ponder if they reacted appropriately. Ivy commented that giving students the opportunity to reflect on their actions allowed them to independently reach the conclusion if their behavior was appropriate or not appropriate. Fortitude reflected on her use of reflective questioning and shared how she is intentional about making sure she does not tell the students how their decision was good or bad, but instead asks them questions such as, “What do you think about your actions,” and “How could you have responded differently.” PVA, LilSis, and Lawson equally shared their success with offering reflective questions to students to help shape their abilities to exhibit appropriate personal and social behaviors. PVA described the effectiveness of using reflective questions with students who have endured trauma the following way:

> I can see a student who would respond in a way I feel is inappropriate or counterproductive to school rules. Typically, it is the type of student who has been through a lot. I would ask them if the way they responded was the best way to react to the situation. I do not tell them what I think. I let them tell me what they think. Then I ask why they feel this way. Usually, if it is a bad choice, they can see why it wasn't the best action to take.

LilSis shared that she feels that students often make emotional decisions which are not the best. She recounted that middle school students have fluctuating emotions and may lack the ability to make responsible decisions:

> Middle school kids are moody. They feel one way one minute, and another way the next minute. I always tell them they can't make good decisions when their feelings are all over the place. I often ask them was their decision the best decision for a situation.

Based on her experiences, Lawson believes that students who have been through trauma are not very trusting, hence, they do not always possess the capability to make the best decisions. She shared that she uses reflective questioning to gently guide students to truly think about their actions and not make choices without thinking. Engaging students who have experienced trauma in reflective questioning gives students the needed tools to have appropriate personal and social behaviors by allowing them the opportunity to independently make connections on what is acceptable and what is not.

Thoughtful Modeling

Thoughtful modeling provides a preplanned example of thinking or action that students can observe, unpack, and adopt. In addition to reflective conversations, five of the nine participants commented that they use thoughtful modeling to illustrate the importance of making

good decisions, especially with students who have experienced trauma. PVA, Ivy, LilSis, Fortitude, and Lawson shared how they take opportunities to model the appropriate way to handle a situation with their students. PVA relayed that when difficult or uncomfortable situations happen in the classroom, she tells her students personal or professional situations she has experienced that resemble that situation and how she handled it. PVA shared:

> One time I noticed two students who were friends disagreeing and ultimately it caused them to have conflict during instructional time. I stopped the lesson and explained a time when I disagreed with a friend in class, instead of rolling my eyes, I would write on my notebook I will be respectful. This helped me not say something rude and get in trouble.

Ivy and LilSis both explained that they model what they feel are effective responses to circumstances out of their control. Ivy shared when changes happen, such as a change in the school schedule or a requirement from administration she does not agree with, she takes a deep breath and says out loud, “It is what it is. Now what I am going to do to get it done?” Ivy explained she has done this enough time in front of the students that they already know what her response is when there is an unplanned shift in the day.

LilSis explained that she welcomes when she can model for students how to respond to situations in a positive way. LilSis shared that middle school students are so ready to “pop off” or get upset for the smallest issue, and most times how they respond gets them in even bigger trouble. She acknowledged that when she sees this happening, who would say, “Let me show you a better way to handle that.” Then, LilSis illustrates a more proactive and constructive response to the issue. LilSis believes that her use of thoughtful modeling is exceptionally impactful with students who have endured trauma because it provides an alternative to reactionary or aggressive feedback that may be associated with the trauma students may have endured.

In addition, Fortitude and Lawson shared their use of thoughtful modeling and its benefits in their classroom. Fortitude likewise described that it is important to make sure to ask students for feedback about what they observed and allow them to give alternative perspectives about what is appropriate and what is not. Thoughtful modeling is a valuable strategy to assist middle school students who have endured trauma, because students can learn from an educator's positive actions.

Transparency

Four of the nine participants regarded responsible decision making as significance because it created a feeling of being transparent with students. Lawson, PVA, Ivy, and LilSis all shared that they are honest and transparent with their students about the successes they have experienced, as well as the mistakes they have made. The four participants explained being transparent with students about how their poor decision making at times had detrimental results. Lawson relayed the following:

> I allow my students to ask me anything [appropriate] and I tell them I will answer them. I am honest with them about some of the dumb things I did and the negative consequences. I can tell students really connect to me when I talk about the mistakes I made and how I grew to be a better person.

PVA shared that she tells her students about the difficulties she experienced growing up, and explained, "I do not want y'all to go through some of the same things I did if y'all can help it." She feels that being transparent with students is important because it helps them relate to her as a teacher even more. PVA exclaimed that students connect quickly when they realize there is a commonality. She uses her experiences to help students evaluate their behaviors and choices. Much like Lawson and PVA, Ivy also credits her willingness to be open about her own life

experiences as a factor in helping students who have experienced trauma make responsible decisions.

Ivy described how she tells students her story including "the good, the bad, and the ugly." "I only tell them," shared Ivy, "because I want them to realize they are not alone." Ivy believes that some students who have endured trauma feel they have a pass to make bad decisions because they have been through a hard time. Ivy shared the following about being an influence to her students when discussing responsible decision making:

> I share what I have been through because I want my students to know that just because they have gone through some things, it does not give them the right to act up. I have gone through things too.

Ivy did explain, however, that having this mindset was not always the best because she realized that her trauma may be different from her students' trauma. Ivy validated that she just did not want her students to use their trauma as a reason to be noncompliant because she endured hard times as well, yet she worked hard to follow the rules.

LilSis emphasized how being transparent gives some students a feeling of calm. She recounted that she tells students about her daughter, and some decisions she has made that she regrets. "When I tell students about my mistakes, it makes me more approachable," LilSis commented. She believes this helps her guide students when they seek her help or guidance related to appropriate social or personal behaviors. Other participants relayed that by being transparent with students who have endured trauma, they contribute positively to students' ability to make beneficial choices regarding personal behavior and social engagements determined by moral values, safety, and social norms.

Research Question 4: Self Awareness

RQ4 explored how teacher leaders support self-awareness of students to help them respond to trauma. The developing themes that were apparent on how teachers embed trauma-informed practices in their instruction to highlight self-awareness were journaling and accountable talk.

Journaling

The four participants who were middle school teachers previously, but currently provide district level support of middle school teachers who implement trauma-informed practices, collectively agreed that journaling is a great technique to assist students with their self-perception. In addition, journaling offers self-reflection opportunities which assist with the development of skills and language to help students describe themselves. Maddie, Averi, Xavier, and Wundershun unanimously shared that journaling is an effective tool to access students' emotions through instruction. Maddie explained that she encourages teachers to allow time within the class period for students to journal. She feels that journal topics can give students a foundation to freely write about their feelings on a variety of subjects. Xavier explained that she even recommends that students create journal topics of their choice. She specifically advocates for the use of this technique with students who have experienced trauma. Xavier reported the following about students selecting journal topics:

> When students recommend what they should journal about in class, it not only provides them [the student] the chance to express their feelings about topics which are important to them, but it also gives the teacher an opportunity to see what concerns students may have, or what situations students have gone through. It also helps to determine if some students

share the same type of experiences, and if the teacher needs to provide outside support from a counselor or get administration involved.

Xavier claimed that she also stresses the value of journaling with English teachers. She asserted that journaling is a way to improve students' writing abilities. Xavier feels that although students' journals should not be graded for accuracy, it is a great way for English teachers to determine what writing mechanics they can focus on during instruction. This is a prime example of blending trauma-informed practices and instruction, so students can benefit.

Averi and Wundershun conveyed their personal experiences about journaling when they were classroom teachers. Averi described an experience when a student turned in a journal topic about her parents going through a divorce. Averi relayed that she could relate to some of the emotions the student shared because she also experienced those feelings when her parents went through a divorce. She talked with the student privately and expressed that she understood some of the things the student mentioned in her journal writing. She told the student if she wanted to continue to write about her emotions regarding her parents' divorce, she was free to do so. "Relating to the student and giving them permission to express their feelings helped the student a great deal," shared Averi. Similarly, Wundershun recollected when there was a young girl in her class who had endured a traumatic experience. The student did not talk much. After reading the student's journals, Wundershun assessed that the young lady was having concerns with depression. As a result, Wundershun reached out to the school counselor for additional support.

Ivy shared a specific way she implements journal time in her classroom. She alternates between allowing students to write what they want during journal time and providing them a topic. She explains to her students that if they would like to discuss privately things they have written, they are free to share their journal in the thought box, which is a box located in a

designated section of the classroom. Ivy also explains to the students that they can have a private conference with her if they so choose. Ivy provided her lesson plan as an artifact, documenting her use of this approach (Figure 7).

Figure 7

Lesson Plan Documenting Thought Box

Lesson Plan

TEACHER: [redacted] SUBJECT: Professional Communications GRADE LEVEL: 7 PERIODS: 2-7
STUDENT EXPECTATION(S): WEEK OF: 8/30-9/3

W e d & T h r	Teacher will share SEL videos from students with the class.	Obj: Students will demonstrate use of content, technical concepts, and vocabulary EQ: Why is it important to exercise professional communication skills in the 21st century? Students will present special event speeches during synchronous instruction.	Students will present special event speeches	Students will present special event speeches	Teacher will provide general feedback to students through a specific speech rubric and advise them on techniques which could improve their presentation skills.
F r i d a y	Describe your plan for self-care this weekend, and share out.	We will begin our weekly Friday DEAR (Drop Everything and Read) Literacy time. Students will read the assigned article (15 mins), and complete a two paragraph reflection describing something new they learned, something they would have done differently if they were the main character, and something they wish the author would have addressed.	DEAR Literacy time *Individual teacher-student "thought-box" dialogue/conferences will take place during students' DEAR reading and reflection literacy time. Priority conferencing will be granted to those with dire SEL concerns.	Round table Share-out: Class discussion about DEAR article and answer reflections	Round table Share-out: Class discussion about DEAR article and answer reflections

Ivy said the following regarding her use of journaling and the thought box:

I allow students to share privately with me journals they have placed in the thought box. This way they do not have to share out loud things they do not want everyone to know but want to talk about. The thought box has become very popular in my classroom. I realize students really need someone to hear them and what they are going through.

The results shared by Maddie, Averi, Ivy, Wundershun, and Xavier all support the value in journaling and its capacity to assist students with self-efficacy and help with identifying their emotions.

Accountable Talk

Participants Maddie, Averi, Wundershun, and Xavier described the technique accountable talk as a social and emotional learning strategy that focuses on talk that is expressive, respectful, and mutually beneficial to both parties. They confirmed that they discuss this strategy while training teachers on trauma-informed practices. This strategy is exceptionally effective to facilitate students making self-awareness connections by recognizing their emotions, thoughts, and morals. Maddie reflected on the benefit of accountable talk by relaying the following:

> Accountable talk gives students the chance to engage in healthy debating while stimulating higher ordering thinking. This way the teacher infuses instruction and students' emotions at the same time.

Lawson and Fortitude, who have attended one of Maddie's trainings where she discussed the effectiveness of accountable talk, described how they use this technique during her instruction. Lawson explained that during her training, she learned that accountable talk must be taught to students. Lawson continued to chronicle her application of accountable talk by saying that she would teach a lesson, then stop her instruction, and then ask students question stems, such as "does anyone think..." or "could you explain..." These question stems are examples of accountable talk. Not only does accountable talk cause students to think critically about what they are learning, it also encourages students to connect their instruction to their emotions. Lawson feels this is crucially vital when dealing with students who have endured traumatic situations. "Simply asking a student what they think can be empowering," Lawson states. Fortitude shared that accountable talk was very helpful in her classes where students struggled to engage with one another. Students who have endured traumatic events often feel devalued or insignificant. Accountable talk supports the voice of students who otherwise would be reluctant

to share their feelings or emotions. Having the opportunity to share emotions can be therapeutic to students who are in need to do so.

Research Question 5: Self-Management

RQ5 explored how teacher leaders implement discipline management strategies that encourage students to redirect negative behavior and make better choices. Six participants discussed some aspect of restorative practices as the significant influence on their efforts when implementing techniques to redirect student behavior. In addition to restorative practices, seven participants also shared they used de-escalation strategies to redirect combative or disruptive behavior.

Restorative Practices

Participants who train teachers and those who are currently in the classroom discussed their techniques to address student behavior, especially negative behavior exhibited by students who have endured trauma. Maddie explained that restorative practices are an alternative to punitive discipline, and it lessens, as well as attempt to avoid, harmful behavior. Xavier and Wundershun both talked about how restorative practices are crucial in building healthy relationships between students and teachers. Xavier expressed the following:

> We train teachers to understand that students who have been through difficult times can appear to be combative. Old school discipline doesn't work. Just suspending them doesn't work. Restorative practices allow the student to repair what was broken, as well as help the student form a solid bond with their teachers.

Xavier trains teachers to understand that students who have endured trauma need support in how to utilize self-management strategies. "You have to teach students, especially middle school students, how to respond the right way," exclaimed Xavier. Restorative practices strategies are

an effective way to redirect behavior of students who have endured trauma because it focuses on five critical aspects of the misbehavior: what happened, what was the thinking of the individual at the time of the behavior, what thoughts followed the misbehavior, who was harmed by the misbehavior, and what must be done to repair the situation or make things better.

Averi feels restorative practice techniques allow the student to dissect the misbehavior and be reflective of their actions. She believes that sometimes students need to see that they caused the problem and it is not "everyone else's fault." Maddie, Averi, Wundeshun, and Xavier train teachers on the self-management competency of SEL as framed by CASEL. Each of these four participants have shared their focus on self-management when addressing the support of students who have been through difficult times.

Xavier conveyed that their training instructs teachers to implement methods that will help students regulate their emotions and thoughts, while working on personal and academic goals. Restorative practices align with trauma-informed practices because it takes in consideration the emotions of the individual, and how those emotions may influence how a person responds. Trauma-informed practices highlight the fact that trauma significantly contributes to a person's perception. Wunderson shared the following about why she subscribes to the use of restorative practices with students who have survived difficult life experiences:

> If a student has gone through some things, they can be triggered by harsh responses or strict disciplinary consequences. That is why I like restorative practices. It holds the student responsible for their actions, but through a therapeutic approach. That is exactly what students who have been through hard times need. They do not need one more person who does not understand or will not listen.

PVA and LilSis discussed using restorative circles, a component of restorative practices, when dealing with conflicts between students. PVA recalled a time a group of girls where having struggles in her class. She claimed that the situation became a major disruption and the students were threatening physical harm to each other. Per PVA, there was a main instigator in the entire situation. PVA recalled the following about the occurrence:

> They were going to fight, and this one girl was the main one leading everyone to do so. I called them in my classroom before school and we had restorative circle. I honestly did not think it would work, but it did.

LilSis explained that she initially did not think restorative circles were going to work either, but she was desperate to try something other than traditional punitive measures. Once she saw the benefits of restorative circles, especially with difficult students who were combative due to the trauma they experienced, she made the use of restorative practices to address misbehavior a standard in her classroom.

De-Escalation Strategies

Participants were questioned about the self-management strategies they used to redirect behavior of students who have been exposed to detrimental life occurrences. Seven of the participants revealed that they implement de-escalation techniques to allow students to manage their emotions so they can think clearly and not act irrationally. The de-escalation strategies shared by the participants were mindfulness, calm down corners, and the use Thinkery rooms.

Mindfulness is an activity that concentrates on a person’s consciousness on the present, while recognizing and accepting one's feeling, thoughts, and bodily sensations. Averi transparently shared that mindfulness is one of her favorite strategies to illustrate to teachers who are dealing with students who display difficult behavior, especially if the students have lived

through traumatic experiences. Averi explained that mindfulness not only supports SEL competencies, such as self-awareness, self-management, and social awareness, but it is, in her opinion, one of the easiest techniques for teachers to learn and implement. Averi delved deeper on the benefits of mindfulness by sharing the following:

> Mindfulness is a technique that all teachers can do with students. The only real requirement for this technique to work is having an open mind. I have seen some of the most confrontational students become calm and centered after teachers used mindfulness in the classroom.

Maddie, Averi, Wundershun, and Xavier conducted a district training for middle school teachers titled Mindfulness in the Classroom. These participants referenced the training and reported how the strategies discussed were helpful when dealing with students who have experienced trauma. Xavier, however, specifically cautioned that teachers who use mindfulness as a strategy to redirect student behavior should consider idiosyncrasies that are associated with students who have survived traumatic situations. For example, Xavier clarified that the teacher must gauge the child's window of tolerance and make sure that the mindfulness activity does not trigger the student. Xavier recollected the following regarding trauma sensitive mindfulness:

> Mindfulness is a great way to build relationships, which is important when students don't trust others due to trauma they have tolerated. But teachers shouldn't force it. Silence may trigger some students and as a result, some students may avoid it. Start with simple requests, like breathing calmly.

Mindfulness not only helps establish effective classroom management, but it facilitates students' ability to self-regulate and focus on their emotional responses. Mindfulness establishes safety,

which is a critical need for students who have personal knowledge of upsetting life circumstances.

The four participants who currently train teachers on trauma-informed strategies framed in CASEL's SEL framework specifically highlight mindfulness as a useful technique to address self-management. In addition to mindfulness, other participants relayed their use of other de-escalation techniques, like the use of calm down areas in the classroom, where students can have more individualized use of mindfulness methods to de-escalate escalated behavior. Maddie, Averi, Wundershun, and Xavier described a global classroom approach to self-management, whereas LilSis, PVA, and Lawson discussed more prescriptive self-management techniques by establishing designated locations in their rooms as calm down areas where students can have a place to regulate their conduct. LilSis explained that she initially observed this technique when she taught elementary but felt it could be equally successful in a middle school classroom environment. She recounts a time when a student was getting escalated because he couldn't get an answer correct. LilSis shared with her class that they can go to the cool down spot in the room and collect their emotions when they feel they are about to have an outburst. A timer is set for no more than five minutes. Students can practice mindfulness independently and individually. LilSis explained the following on how the cool down spot worked:

> I created a nonverbal signal, which was tugging of the ear. If a student tugged their ear, they could go to the cool down spot and practice individual calming strategies, like breathing or listening to meditation. They could not stay longer than five minutes, then they could rejoin the class.

LilSis admitted that she had to make changes to the cool down spot method because initially middle school students felt it was too elementary or they would stay in the area way too long. "After I changed it up a bit, it worked a lot better," stated LilSis.

PVA shared that she places a de-escalation station near her desk. She believes this helps her support students who need to utilize self-management strategies to control their behavior. PVA acknowledged that placing the de-escalation station near her is helpful for students who have gone through difficult situations because it helps them feel safe. Lawson shared that she allows students to get up and pace a certain area of the room for three minutes. "I believe giving them a little break helps them get themselves together," described Lawson. She has to make sure that they return to instruction, so they do not misuse the strategy and the behavior worsens. Cool down areas in the classroom allow students to self-manage aggressive or disruptive behavior. Based on the participants' feedback, this strategy is especially impactful because it permits the students to independently use de-escalation methods and quickly return to instruction. This way, students' misconduct does not have to overwhelm their learning experience.

Participants seemingly agree that self-management is a competency that is a focus when dealing with students who have experienced trauma. As a result, the use of various strategies has been reviewed to help students deal with belligerent or disruptive behavior in a positive way. Designated areas in the classroom, such as de-escalation stations, or calm down corners have been proven beneficial in this effort. However, Averi mentioned the use of Thinkery rooms to address the need for students to use self-management techniques. When questioned what is a Thinkery, Averi provided the following description that is posted on her district's website:

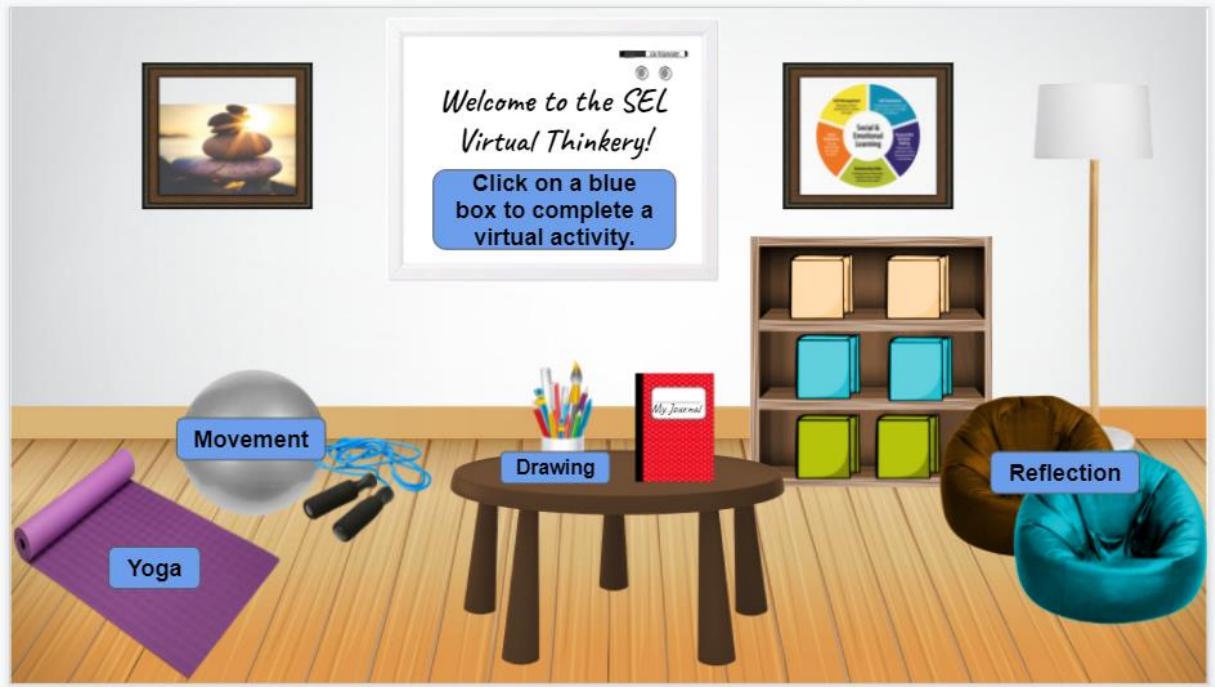
> The SEL Thinkery is a therapeutic, supportive calming space that assists students in their self-calming efforts by offering them an opportunity to relax and reset. In the Thinkery,

> students can participate in silent reflection, yoga, journaling, meditation, physical movement, and sensory activities The term “Thinkery” aligns with the Restorative Practices Initiative which promotes building strong relationships between individuals and social connections within communities. The Thinkery space serves as a place where students can work on personal growth and reflect on their roles within relationships and communities.

Averi celebrated the fact that Thinkery rooms are being established at various campuses throughout her district and that she is aware that other districts are implementing the same to help student use self-management techniques to deal with their emotions. Averi shared that she is actively training teachers about the benefits of Thinkery rooms, and why they are helpful. She believes that some students need to be removed from the classroom to regulate their behavior. Traditionally students who act out because they have gone through difficult life situations, receive exclusionary discipline placements. Averi feels that exclusionary discipline placements may temporarily address the behavior, but do not provide supportive resources to deal with the root causes of student misconduct, which most times stems from student trauma. A Thinkery is a separate room outside of the classroom where the student can go utilize resources to assist them with self-control. Unlike mindfulness methods and calm down areas in the classroom, a Thinkery is located out the classroom. In her training, Averi explained that this room should not have a combined purpose, but should be solely used as a place where students can go and work through difficult emotions which may cause disruptive behavior. Averi provided as an artifact Figure 8, which is a copy of a slide she uses in her training for leaders who are organizing Thinkery rooms on their campuses.

Figure 8

Thinkery Room Set Up



Averi confirmed that Thinkery Rooms are a positive responsive for student disruption. This is most helpful for students who have gone through trauma because it is a deviation from punitive exclusionary discipline placements. Thinkery rooms offer resources and support that students can use to achieve self-management.

Summary

In Chapter 4, I restated the purpose of the study. The chapter specified the findings of the study which were clarified applying the themes that developed during the data analysis process. Chapter 5 embraces a review and outline of the study, discusses the conclusions, makes recommendations for practitioners and provides suggestions for future research.

Chapter 5: Summary, Discussion, Recommendations, and Conclusions

The purpose of this qualitative instrumental case study was to explore strategies for supporting students experiencing trauma as perceived of teacher leaders as framed by CASEL's social and emotional learning theory. This case study utilized interviews and artifacts from nine teacher leaders to investigate successful strategies implemented to address empathy or social awareness, relationship skills, responsible decision making, self-awareness, and self-management. This chapter provides a summary of the study, conclusions based on the findings, implications for practice, suggestions for future studies on this topic, and concluding remarks.

Summary of the Study

This study used a qualitative case study design. One on one internet-based interviews via Zoom were conducted to explore strategies teacher leaders used to support students who have experienced trauma based on CASEL's social and emotional learning framework. Participants shared artifacts that substantiated their use of various methods used to help students who experienced difficult life situations. The submission of these artifacts strengthened the validity to the information of shared in the interview.

Background of the Study

Students in grades K-12 who have not yet achieved maturity, struggle significantly to reply suitably when they have endured difficult and troubling encounters in their lives (Cummings et al., 2017; Frydman & Mayor, 2017; Von Dohlen et al., 2019). For example, when students go to school and display an outward emotional response to personal traumatic experiences, it often results in students being withdrawn and angry, displaying behavior issues, or exhibiting noncompliant reactions, which makes it difficult for educators to teach or engage with the students (Tabone et al., 2020). This type of emotional response from students causes

teacher leaders and school personnel to find strategies and tools to implement when they must address adverse student behavior or issues because of the trauma students have endured (Tabone et al., 2020).

The traumatic events or understandings that children have experienced from ages 0-17 years are known as Adverse Childhood Experiences, or ACEs (CDC, 2020). Many students in grades K-12 have ACES and, as a result, have some measure of difficulty in school environments and seek support from their teachers and school personnel (Mersky et al., 2017; Wan et al., 2020). Recent studies have acknowledged that students experience trauma and how it impacts their performance in school (Gherardi et al., 2020; Stratford et al., 2020; Tabone et al., 2020). Global occurrences such as the COVID-19 pandemic, natural disasters (e.g., a hurricane), and national events (e.g., political election and civil unrest) are all traumatic events students have recently experienced (Baloran, 2020; Diab & Schultz, 2021; Hannigan & Saini, 2020). These events shape how students feel, and how they process concerns, emotions, their academic performance, perceptions, and the foundation of their relationships with others (Diab & Schultz, 2021). Even more specific experiences, such as divorce, illness, death, or family separation, may result in students experiencing trauma (Goddard, 2021).

Teacher leaders are generally aware that almost all students have experienced some sort of trauma (Diab & Schultz, 2021; Goodwin, 2020). Baloran (2020) noted that most recently, teachers are witnessing students who are dealing with the traumatic effects associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. Students' method of receiving instruction abruptly changed from face to face, to hybrid, to completely online. As a result of the rapid change with the way students interact with their friends due to COVID restrictions, and concern about their health and safety, some students have become withdrawn, and exhibit emotions associated with anxiety,

depression, anger, and fear (Baloran, 2020; Hannigan & Saini, 2020). These emotions are exhibited through responses such as disruptive behavior, failing grades, combative interactions, and noncompliance. Teachers recognize trauma and can assess when something is wrong (Goodwin, 2020; Yohannan & Carlson, 2019).

Research supports that teachers seek interventions, methods, and techniques to implement to respond effectively to students who have experienced traumatic events (Dunn & Doolittle, 2020; Howell et al., 2019; McIntyre et al., 2019). However, just recognizing or acknowledging that trauma influences student behavior is not the significant challenge teacher leaders' experience; for example, when asked, teachers acknowledge that they are aware that students experience certain things and as a result, these experiences of students shape how they behave, interpret information, perceive assistance, and respond to authority (Herrenkohl et al., 2019; Stokes & Brunzell, 2019).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative instrumental case study was to explore strategies for supporting students experiencing trauma as perceived by teacher leaders framed in CASEL's social and emotional learning theory (Aksoy & Gresham, 2020; Boldt, 2020; Pawlo et al., 2019).

Research Questions

RQ1: How do teacher leaders teach empathy to students to help them respond to trauma?

RQ2: How do teacher leaders build trusting relationships with students to help them respond to trauma?

RQ3: How do teacher leaders empower students to make responsible decisions to help them respond to trauma?

RQ4: How do teacher leaders support self-awareness of students to help them respond to trauma?

RQ5: How do teacher leaders teach self-management to students to help them respond to trauma?

Review of the Research Design and Methodology

A qualitative, instrumental case study design was used to explore strategies used by teacher leaders to support students experiencing trauma framed by CASEL's social and emotional learning framework. Data were collected and analyzed from nine teacher leaders in metropolitan areas in the South. The primary source of data within the study was one on one interviews conducted via Zoom. The data source included interview questions steered by guided protocol and combined based on the research questions. The secondary sources of data within this study were field notes, artifacts (e.g., excerpts lesson plans, information from district websites, student activities). Participants voluntarily provided artifacts via email. The transcripts from each interview, as well as personal artifacts, were reviewed repeatedly for data analysis. The coded data were then organized to access patterns and themes. The developing themes served as the foundation for the analysis and explanation of the findings.

Summary of Major Findings

The results of this study are summarized by each research question.

RQ1 explored how teacher leaders taught empathy to students to help them respond to trauma. The findings were:

- Inquiry activities
- Explicit instruction
- Social contracts

RQ2 reviewed how teacher leaders build trusting relationships to help students respond to trauma. The findings were:

- Daily check-ins
- Use of positive affirmations and conversations

RQ3 surveyed how teachers' leaders respond to students to help them respond to trauma. The findings were:

- Reflective conversations
- Thoughtful modeling
- Transparency

RQ4 inspected how teachers support self-awareness to help teacher leaders respond to trauma. The findings were:

- Accountable talk
- Journaling

RQ5 inquired how teacher leaders teach self-management to students to help them respond to trauma. The findings were:

- De-escalation strategies.
- Restorative practices

Discussion and Conclusions on Findings

The qualitative case study highlighted strategies of teacher leaders who supported students experiencing trauma. In a review of CASEL's social and emotional learning framework, a comprehensive conclusion based on this study findings is that professional development is necessary to effectively teach teachers how to implement trauma-informed techniques that align with the five competencies of social and emotional learning. Specific trauma-informed practices

and systems must be established and defined so that students and teachers can mutually benefit from the importance of highlighting emotional needs. When systems are followed, students can perform better academically and behaviorally. Howell et al. (2019) suggested, “The degree of trauma exposure among our adolescent students makes it imperative for school leadership to engage in ensuring school-wide systems and practices are in place” (p. 26). It is crucial that teacher leaders receive prescriptive professional development opportunities focusing on trauma-informed practices to support the needs of students who have behavior issues as a result of distressing, or traumatic experiences (Crosby et al., 2020).

In addition to establishing routines and procedures, which are guided by trauma-informed practices aligned with the five competencies of social and emotional learning, it is important to note that these efforts should not be independent of academic instruction, but inclusive of academic instruction (Walker, 2006). Schonert-Reichl (2019) explained that integrating SEL in academics improves students’ attitudes towards school, increase test scores, raise grades and attendance, as well as reduces conduct problems and risk-taking behaviors. Successful implementation of trauma-informed practices framed by CASEL’s social and emotional learning framework requires informative professional development and a targeted incorporation of instructional content for students to truly profit from strategies used by teachers.

Research Question 1

RQ1 explored how teacher leaders taught empathy to students to help them respond to trauma. Participants shared they attended professional development on how to implement methods that would encourage individuals to extend empathy to others, especially students who have experienced trauma. As a result, the participants stated they benefitted from the techniques shared during the professional development. Bell (2018) and Casale et al. (2018) acknowledged

having a trauma-informed approach encourages the foundation for teachers to establish empathy, which is the ability to understand and relate to the feelings of others. Based on the findings of this study, a conclusion is that teachers increase the feeling of safety and calm of students who have experienced trauma when they extend a measure of empathy to them.

Participants in this study stated that their use of inquiry activities, also known as getting-to-know-you activities, fostered an empathetic atmosphere in the classroom. When students can share a little bit about their lives and experiences, it allows the teacher and others to see where there might be commonalties in situations. Inquiry activities help normalize certain circumstances students have gone through. For students who have experienced trauma, being able to have a connection with someone else who has gone through the same or similar experience can ease emotional tension that may exist. Inquiry activities can decrease anxiety associated with communication, feeling of empowerment, and help create group identification and solidarity in the classroom (Sawyer et al., 2009). Participants supported their use of inquiry activities to teach students how to be more empathetic towards students who have survived difficult circumstances. Establishing empathy towards students who have experienced detrimental events in their lives is important when creating positive relationships and establishing a safe environment (Riess, 2017). Information shared by participants in this study substantiated that those who have been through troubling times want to feel safe and have a desire for others to be compassionate. Inquiry activities help facilitate empathy, a consideration of others and, foster a positive and conducive learning environment.

In addition to the application of inquiry activities to inspire empathy, participants elaborated on integrating social and emotional learning in academics, specifically using explicit instruction, as a successful method to encourage students to consider the feelings of other. Jagers

et al. (2019) provided support that the integration of social and emotional learning in academics improves students' attitude towards school. Specifically, explicit instruction helps students make a connection to what they are learning and their own personal life experiences. When this strategy is used with students who are experiencing trauma, it aides in decreasing the feeling of loneliness that is associate with traumatic circumstances. Loibl et al. (2017) supported the use of explicit instruction by stating that teachers should incorporate instruction that reflect the diversity of the students in the classroom, which include their backgrounds and experiences as well. The participants in this study shared how they focus on teaching and showing empathy to students who have experienced trauma by adapting lessons to meet not only students' academic needs but their emotional needs as well. Loibl et al. explained that explicit instruction should be student centered and engage students on how what they are learning plays out in their own lives. Participants confirmed their intention to make sure their use of explicit instruction was to facilitate connections for students who have gone through detrimental occurrences and help establish a safe environment.

Social contracts create norms that a collective group should abide by for the betterment of all. The participants elaborated their use of social contracts and explained how it helped create empathy by detailing the values of others in the classroom. Marques (2020) stated that social contracts use in classrooms are effective in showing others the value of respect because it highlights what is considered appropriate and not appropriate, and what lines should not be crossed.

Research Question 2

RQ2 explored how teacher leaders established relationships with students who have experienced trauma to create safe learning environments. Based on the findings, daily check-ins

and positive affirmations are crucially impactful when supporting students who have endured traumatic conditions. The findings of this study propose that embedding daily check-ins, being intentional about using positive affirmations, and having positive conversations with students can significantly enhance the potential for students and teachers to have a positive relationship. Because of the trauma experiences of students, the school environment and the relationship students have with their teachers become critical in responding appropriately to students' needs (Espelage et al., 2021). Participants felt their positive relationship with students were established through their use of check-ins, such as threshold greetings, and being specific with praise and positive affirmations. Gibbs (2020) substantiated the significance of setting the tone of the classroom and welcoming the opportunity to have a good relationship with students. Participants shared specific examples where they had success building relationships with students who were experiencing trauma because they simply greeted students at the door or said something nice. Teacher leaders and their relationships with their students are pivotal to the success of the implementation of trauma-informed practices (Blair, 2010). Participants agreed that trauma can cause students not to feel valued or appreciated, therefore it is important for teachers to be diligent in their approach to interact with all students, but more specifically students who have gone through detrimental situations. Research supports that students who have experienced disturbing events in their lives grapple with the challenge of maintaining healthy relationships after dealing with the harsh aftermath of surviving trauma (Naik, 2019). The findings of this study emphasize the importance of building relationships with students.

Research Question 3

RQ3 investigated how teacher leaders empower students to make responsible decisions to help them respond to trauma. The findings of the study suggest engaging in reflective

conversations, thoughtful modeling, and being transparent are three important factors in helping motivate students to make responsible decisions. The ability to make sound decisions is largely based on how the brain processes information and as a result, how an individual reaches conclusion regarding actions that should ensue (Boullier & Blair, 2018). Participants relayed that based on their experience with students who experienced trauma, trauma impeded students' cognitive ability to make wise choices. Students who have been exposed to trauma are increasingly even more challenged academically and behaviorally because of their impairment to thinking reasonably and make ethical and constructive choices about personal and social behavior (Richards et al., 2019). Participants' relayed specific experiences where having reflective conversations, thoughtful modeling, and being transparent were helpful in addressing the academic and behavior impairment caused due to trauma. Hrastinski (2019) substantiated that thoughtful modeling is a preplanned example of thinking or action that students can observe, unpack or adopt. Participants validated their use of thoughtful modeling as a key component in assisting students who have endured trauma with making responsible decisions and making better choices. Ghafarpour (2017) substantiated reflective conversation and transparency in his research about effective classroom conversation and teacher talk. His research supported the strategies implemented by the participants in that it suggests the conclusion that teachers should not underestimate the importance that conversations held with students can have on their emotional connection and abilities to make responsible decisions.

Research Question 4

RQ4 explored how teacher leaders support self-awareness of students to help them respond to trauma. The findings of this study suggest that students experiencing trauma benefit substantially from journaling and teachers employing accountable talk during instruction. The

participants provided accounts where they used journaling techniques during instruction and students who were experiencing trauma profited from this strategy implementation. Through journaling, students are equipped to think reflectively and express emotions that otherwise they may not accept or even identify (Woodbridge & O'Beirne, 2021). Participants gave accounts where they embedded journaling in their academic plans and shared that it not only provided an avenue for the students writing and instructional skills to be strengthened, but it served as a poignant resource for emotional wellness and activating student voice. Research supports that middle school students who can journal as a part of their classroom routine, have an increase improvement in their wellbeing and since of safety (Boyd, 2019). Journaling is exceptionally valuable when students can select their journal topic or free write about their emotions. Journaling is a powerful tool to integrate social and emotional learning in academics, especially when students can select their journal topic (Linares, 2019; Walker, 2006). A conclusion of this study further supports the belief that the use of journaling is authentically effective when students selected their own topic.

Accountable talk is a suitable technique to use to encourage students to make connections with their learning and life experiences. Participants in the study shared their use of accountable talk and detailed its success with students who have endured trauma. Calcangi and Lago (2018) stated that accountable talk is a meaningful technique to help reluctant talkers communicate openly and facilitate higher order thinking skills. Participants shared that students who have experienced trauma seem to have trouble academically. Research supports that trauma not only has a bearing on students' behavior, but it also contributes to cognitive and academic concerns as well (Frydman & Mayor, 2017; Layne et al., 2014; Moore et al., 2020). Accountable talk is meaningful, respectful, and mutually beneficial to both the teacher and the student. Accountable

talk stimulates higher order thinking which may be affected due to trauma students have endured (Calcangi & Lago, 2018; Layne et al., 2014). Based on findings from the participants in this study accountable talk is important because it facilitates healthy debating and helps students improve their communication skills.

Research Question 5

RQ5 inquired how teacher leaders teach self-management to students to help them respond to trauma. The findings of this study suggest that restorative practices and de-escalation strategies are advantageous when addressing self-management of student who have endured trauma. Tabone et al. (2020) argued that when students go to school and display an outward emotional response to personal traumatic experiences, this often results in students being withdrawn and angry, displaying behavior issues, or exhibiting noncompliant reactions, which makes it difficult for educators to teach or engage with the students. Participants explained their response to the misconduct of students who have gone through trauma by using nonpunitive measures such as restorative practices. Silverman and Mee (2018) purported that restorative practices are a positive approach to misconduct and deviates for a typical punitive reaction to misbehavior. Many teachers believe that students who have endured trauma and display poor behavior are making a deliberate choice to do so (Yohannan & Carlson, 2019). Participants shared vivid examples how their use of restorative practices worked more efficiently than retaliatory punishment because it allowed the student to reflect on their actions and the harm that was caused. Restorative practices have positive effects on peer relationships and student-teacher interactions, especially for adolescent students (Silverman & Mee, 2018). Participants concurred that positive reactions help foster students to use self-management strategies more efficiently.

De-escalation strategies are also a useful technique to facilitate students who have experienced trauma to address behavior concerns (Mehari et al., 2021). Research supports that de-escalation strategies, such as mindfulness, can decrease behavior concerns and increase students use of self-regulating tactics to control their actions (Rice, 2019; Verret et al., 2019). Thus, a conclusion based on the findings of this study is that de-escalation techniques are overall more efficient than responding harshly to students who have endured trauma when they misbehave.

Implications for Practice

The findings of this study can be used with teachers, counselors, school staff, and administrators to address the needs of students who have experienced trauma due to daunting events. The implications of this study may assist teacher leaders and administrators with effective tools and resources to use to provide more engaging, inclusive and less reactionary responses to students who may display certain emotional and academic concerns due to trauma. As it relates to best practices of teachers who support students who have endured trauma, I also recommend the following based on the findings:

- Ongoing professional development on trauma-informed practices throughout the school year to provide teacher leaders with information on current recommended strategies, approaches and benefits of its use.
- Data review of students' discipline and academic performance to determine the effectiveness of the implemented trauma-informed strategies.
- Self-assessment for teachers to determine their strengths and weaknesses with use of trauma-informed strategies.

- Embedding daily social and emotional practices based on the five competencies of SEL as a classroom and campus expectation.
- Establish resources to provide support to students and parents to make school to home connections based on trauma-informed strategies.

Recommendation for Future Research

Students in elementary, middle, and high school who have experienced difficult life changing circumstances are progressively more apparent in learning environments across school districts nationwide (Luthar & Mendes, 2020; Rosenberg et al., 2014). As a result, those who support these students are presented with the obligation to respond positively to their needs and issues. To effectively support students who have experienced trauma, teacher leaders must implement prescriptive techniques that help students have a more positive, conducive, learning experience despite the hardships they have endured. This study examined strategies for supporting students experiencing trauma as perceived of teacher leaders. Robust data were captured through lived experiences of teacher leaders and as framed by CASEL's social and emotional learning theory. This study does not address the needs of teachers who vicarious trauma from support emotional support to students with detrimental life situations. Based on the findings of this study, suggestions for future research are as follows:

- Explore the impact of secondary trauma of teachers who support students who have endured traumatic experiences.
- Explore the influence of the integration social and emotional learning on students' academic and behavior performance for a specific grading period.
- Examine how administrators can use trauma-informed strategies campus wide to holistically respond to collective trauma.

- Conduct a comparative analysis of trauma-informed strategies on elementary campuses versus secondary campuses.
- More research is needed on the supports implemented by students and parents beyond the classroom to establish a school to home connection focused on trauma-informed practices.

Reflection and Final Remarks

This qualitative instrumental case study explored strategies used by teacher leaders for supporting students who have experienced trauma. Over the course of the research study, I was impressed by the resilience of teacher leaders to be intentional with thinking outside the box to accommodate students that required additional support. I was also intrigued with the specificity the teacher leaders illustrated with making sure the support that was provided to students was not simply a global response, but prescriptively catered to students' individual needs. In addition, this study has also caused me to emphasize the need to provide more self-guided methods for students to independently use so they have support beyond classroom and at home.

Transparently, as a district administrator who support teachers' implementation of social and emotional learning, I was pleased to know that teachers authentically are using techniques to help students, and not just attending district mandatory professional development because it is a requirement for their job assignment. However, I am concerned about a lack of support and resources for teacher leaders who continuously care for students who have endured trauma, yet they now are experiencing secondary trauma because of the outpouring of emotional assistance they provide. Overall, this experience will guide my future research and motivation for support for individuals impacted by trauma and seek positive learning experiences.

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Appendix A: Question Matrix

Research Question	Interview Question	Sub Question
RQ1 How do teacher leaders teach empathy to students to help them respond to trauma?	What professional development have you attended that helped you as a teacher leader establish empathy for students?	What specific strategies have you used to help students be more understanding of others' experiences?
RQ2 How do teacher leaders build trusting relationships with students to help them respond to trauma?	What specific techniques do you implement to create a safe learning environment to establish trust with students?	What ways do you build relationships with students, so they feel comfortable?
RQ3 How do teacher leaders empower students to make responsible decisions to help them respond to trauma?	How do you model the importance of making good decisions to your students who have experienced traumatic events?	How do you support students who have experienced trauma to have appropriate personal and social behaviors?
RQ4 How do teacher leaders support self-awareness of students to help them respond to trauma?	What strategies do you use to embed trauma informed practices in your instruction to highlight self-awareness?	How do you make sure your instruction reflects students' emotions, and implement supportive strategies to address their feelings?
RQ5 In what ways do teacher leaders teach self-management to students to help them respond to trauma?	How do you implement discipline management strategies that encourage students to make better choices?	What SEL strategy do you feel best supports redirecting behavior of students who have experienced traumatic events?

Appendix B: IRB Approval

ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY
Educating Students for Christian Service and Leadership Throughout the World

Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
320 Hardin Administration Building, ACU Box 29103, Abilene, Texas 79699-9103
325-674-2885

August 9, 2021

Kimberly Parrott
Department of Organizational Leadership
Abilene Christian University

Dear Kimberly,

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board, I am pleased to inform you that your project titled "Exploration of Strategies of Teacher Leaders for Responding to Students Experiencing Trauma Framed by CASEL's Social and Emotional Learning Framework",

(IRB# 21-093)is exempt from review under Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects.

If at any time the details of this project change, please resubmit to the IRB so the committee can determine whether or not the exempt status is still applicable.

I wish you well with your work.

Sincerely,

Megan Roth

Megan Roth, Ph.D.
Director of Research and Sponsored Programs

Appendix C: Informed Consent Form

21-093 Date of Approval: 8/9/2021

Informed Consent Form

TITLE OF STUDY: Exploration of Strategies of Teacher Leaders for Responding to Students Experiencing Trauma framed in CASEL's Social and Emotional Learning Theory.

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

Kimberly D. Parrott
Abilene Christian University School of Educational Leadership

PURPOSE OF STUDY
The purpose of this qualitative instrumental case study is to explore strategies for supporting students experiencing trauma as perceived of teacher leaders as framed by CASEL's social and emotional learning theory.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION
Your participation in this study is voluntary. It is up to you to decide whether to take part in this study. If you decide to take part in this study, you will provide verbal consent. After providing verbal consent, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. Withdrawing from this study will not affect the relationship you have, if any, with the researcher. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

RISKS
You might find some questions difficult to answer. You may decline to answer any or all questions, and you may withdraw your interview participation at any time if you choose. Every study has the risk of breach of confidentiality. Participant data for this study will be kept confidential except in cases where the researcher is legally obligated to report specific incidents. These incidents include, but may not be limited to, incidents of abuse and suicide risk.

STUDY PROCEDURES
The questions that will be asked are open-ended questions, which means you can freely answer your responses in your own words. The interview will take approximately 1 hour. During this time, we will meet online through Zoom and it is very important that you have no distractions. The interview will be video recorded and transcribed later.

BENEFITS
There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this study. Your participation may reveal effective strategies used to support students who have experienced trauma.

CONFIDENTIALITY
Your interview and the responses you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will make every effort to preserve your confidentiality, including the following:

Participants may use pseudonyms of their choice that will be used on all research notes and documents.

Keeping notes, interview transcriptions, and any other identifying participant information in a locked file cabinet in the personal possession of the researcher.

Participant data will be kept confidential except in cases where the researcher is legally obligated to report specific incidents. These incidents include, but may not be limited to, incidents of abuse and suicide risk.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions or concerns at any time about your participating in this study, you may contact the researcher whose contact information is provided on the first page and listed below. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, or if problems arise which you do not feel you can discuss with the Principal Investigator, you may contact the Principal Investigator's Faculty Advisor or the Executive Director of Research listed below.

Kimberly D. Parrott
Principal Investigator

Dr. Sandra Harris
Faculty Advisor

Dr. Megan Roth
Executive Director of Research

VERBAL CONSENT

I understand the provided information and have had the opportunity to ask questions. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and without cost. I verbally agree by stating yes and I voluntarily agree to take part in this study.